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Screen



The deviant relations of *Alien Resurrection*
History and feeling in Latin American cinema
Alan Bennett and heritage
The musical influence on early British films

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Sigourney Weaver and Winona Ryder
in *Alien Resurrection* (Jean-Pierre
Jeunet, 1997). Production companies:
20th Century Fox/Brandywine
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She is not herself: the deviant relations of *Alien Resurrection*

JACKIE STACEY

Writing of the problematic question of spectatorial identification with the heroes of cloning films, Debra Battaglia argues that, 'because the heroes are multiple, not the autonomous egos of Freudian theory, we are *with* the owner and the owned at once, if we are with anyone, our subject-position identifies with a *relation*'.¹ Battaglia conceptualizes the figure of the clone in cinema as a 'supplement', as 'something that supplies, or makes apparent, insufficiencies', for, 'unlike the replicant which requires no connection to an original and is often seen questing for a connection, even a negative connection, to its makers (such as the toy maker and Tyrell Corporation CEO of *Blade Runner*), the clone embodies the closest relation to the original'.² Taking its cue from Battaglia's important insights about the figure of the clone in cinema, this essay examines the embodiment of this relation in the new monsters of genetic engineering which confound the traditional boundaries of sameness and difference so central to debates about body horror film. If the clone embodies a relation as Battaglia contends, this essay examines what is at stake if we consider the implications of this relation as one of sameness. How are we to understand cinematic fantasies of cloning constructed as the monstrous embodiment of relations of sameness? This question emerges in dialogue with a number of feminist debates about the 'monstrosity of sameness'. As Elisabeth Grosz has argued, monsters have traditionally been connected to the idea of the threat of duplication:

Monsters involve some kind of doubling of the human form, a duplication of the body or some of its parts. The major terata

1 Debbora Battaglia 'Multiplicities an anthropologist's thoughts on replicants and clones in popular film' *Critical Inquiry* vol. 27 no. 3 (2001), pp. 493–515, p. 496 (emphasis in original) Battaglia's excellent paper on human replication in popular cinema focuses particularly on the film *Multiplicity* (Harold Ramis 1987)

2 *Ibid.*, p. 506 Battaglia offers an analysis of replicants and clones in the cinema 'as corporealizations of the capacity of the supplement to destabilize the social paradigms and self-knowledge of their creators' In this definition of the 'supplement', Battaglia borrows from Derrida *Ibid.*, p. 496

recognised throughout history are largely monsters of excess, with two or more heads, bodies, or limbs; duplicated sexual organs . . . it is a horror at the possibility of our own imperfect duplication, a horror of submersion in an alien otherness, an incorporation in and by an other³

3 Elizabeth Grosz, 'Freaks Social Semiotics', vol. 1 no. 2 (1991) pp. 22–38, p. 36

4 For a more general discussion of 'the proliferation of sameness' in relation to the shift from reproduction to replication in the context of cloning, see Susan Squier, 'Negotiating boundaries from assisted reproduction to assisted replication', in E. Ann Kaplan and Susan Squier (eds), *Playing Dolly: Technocultural Formations, Fantasies and Fictions of Assisted Reproduction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), pp. 101–15

In this essay, I offer a reading of the film *Alien Resurrection* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997) in terms of its configuration of cloning as the embodiment of what I shall call the relations of 'excessive sameness'.⁴ Whereas all cloning films could be read through this problem of too much sameness, insofar as they are concerned with technologies of copying (those within the science fiction or body horror genres probing the monstrous potentialities of such imitative experiments), I shall argue that the cloning of Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in *Alien Resurrection* is particularly significant to feminist and queer theorists in film studies for the ways in which the relations of sameness embodied in the clone are marked as 'excessive' in their articulation of particular forms of deviance. More specifically, I shall suggest that Ripley's cloning is given cinematic life through multiple and interrelated forms of biological, technological and sexual deviance. The first, biological deviance, will be explored through an analysis of the failed bodies of Ripley's clone siblings and their relation to her cloned perfection; the second, technological deviance, will be explored through an interrogation of the transgenic cloned body and its relation to its human and alien origins; and the third, sexual deviance, will be discussed through a reading of the homoerotic body of Ripley, whose queer desires are related to her technological conception and intimacies with her robotic counterpart Call (Winona Ryder).

My reading of *Alien Resurrection* extends a number of debates within feminist theory, most centrally those concerned with understanding the relationships between cinematic fantasies of monstrous bodies and new forms of genetic technology. To this effect, I shall put feminist theories of the 'geneticization of culture' and the 'teratological imagination' into dialogue with debates about the centrality of the abject for understanding the 'monstrous feminine' in horror film.⁵ Building upon feminist challenges to Barbara Creed's theories of the abject with respect to the horrors of genetic engineering in *Alien Resurrection*, I shall investigate how the queering of desire in the figure of the clone requires us to consider the problem of sameness not only in terms of cloned embodiment,⁶ but also in respect of the film's self-conscious play with the performance of passing.

5 Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993)

6 Catherine Constable, 'Becoming the monster's mother: morphologies of identity in the *Alien* series', in Annette Kuhn (ed.), *Alien Zone II: the Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema* (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 173–202

Deviant cells

- 7 The cultural significance of the kinds of monstrous bodies that populate alien films have been widely debated. See in particular James Kavanagh 'Feminism, humanism and science in *Alien*', and Judith Newton 'Feminism and anxiety in *Alien*' in Annette Kuhn (ed.), *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema* (London: Verso 1990) pp. 73–81, 82–90; Constance Penley, 'Time travel, primal scene and the critical dystopia', in Constance Penley, Elisabeth Lyon, Lynn Spiegel and Janet Bergstrom (eds), *Close Encounters: Film, Feminism and Science Fiction* (Minneapolis, MN and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) pp. 63–82; Kelly Hurley, 'Reading like an alien: posthuman identity in Ridley Scott's *Alien* and David Cronenberg's *Rabid*', in Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (eds), *Posthuman Bodies* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 216–20; Elizabeth Hills, 'From "figurative males" to action heroines: further thoughts on active women in the cinema', *Screen*, vol. 40, no. 1 (1999), pp. 38–51; Pamela Church Gibson, "'You've been in my life so long I can't remember anything else": into the labyrinth with Ripley and the alien' in Matthew Tinkcom and Amy Villarejo (eds), *Keyframes: Popular Cinema and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 35–51.

Whilst the precarious boundary between monstrous and proper bodies pervades both the narrative structure and iconographic landscape of all the *Alien* films,⁷ the fourth film in the series, *Alien Resurrection*, places genetic manipulation centre-stage by organizing its exploration of monstrosity around the story of the cloning of Ripley. Since each *Alien* film has involved the cinematic (re)incarnation of Sigourney Weaver as a different kind of Ripley (from action heroine in *Alien* [Ridley Scott, 1979] to marine cyborg in *Aliens* [James Cameron, 1986] to androgynous social outcast in *Alien 3* [David Fincher, 1992]), the literal cloning of Ripley by scientists in *Alien Resurrection* translates the problem of generic repetition into a scene of genetic enactment. But Ripley is not merely a clone of her former self, she is a transgenic clone: a clone whose original already combined the DNA of two different species – human and alien. Drawn from cellular traces of a Ripley already impregnated with the alien species (causing her sacrificial suicide, as she plunges from a great height in a Christ-like pose down into the flames below, at the end of *Alien 3*), this latest version of Ripley combines her with the monster at the level of genetic inheritance. If cinematic representations of the clone generally construct this figure as the embodiment of a relation, as Battaglia argues, then Ripley as transgenic clone embodies not only the relation of original to copy but, simultaneously, the relation of human body to alien monster. As such, the story of Ripley's artificial reincarnation and transgenic kinship in *Alien Resurrection* moves the series firmly into the spectacular realm of the scientific laboratory and the diseased, 'deformed' and mutating bodies that populate its spaces in the age of the new genetics.

Alien Resurrection places the mutability of the cell at the heart of its spectacular display of monstrous bodies. The mesmerizing credit sequence shows cellular mutations in flowing motion: shot in extreme closeup, the warm golden glow, its reflective, sometimes sticky, shiny surface and the repeated use of circular, interconnected patterns give a honeycomb-like appearance to the substance. But a much more sinister set of associations governs this sequence as, almost immediately, cells mutate into more monstrous distortions. The flow moves in waves accompanied by an eerie musical score which rises and falls to the same rhythmic pattern as the cell motion. A sense of bodily form emerges as the moving contours begin to resemble mutating versions of skin, flesh and bones. Crossing the usual internal/external boundary of bodily integrity, the sticky substances and skeletal patterns are reminiscent of many of the reversals built into the design of the alien bodies in the previous films. The use of extreme closeup shots (accompanied by a distorted mirroring effect) combines with the fluidity of the constant mutation to thwart any

attempt to fix the meaning or origin of the organs and body parts displayed, offering instead a sense of the endless transformational potentialities of cellular formation. Gradually, though, the forms become more recognizable as they transform into grotesquely disfigured organs, ending with a kaleidoscope of monstrosities, as teeth, hair, eyes and bones appear and disappear in the undulating fleshy mass.

In her most recent book, *Metamorphoses Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, Rosi Braidotti argues that the fascination with the monstrous bodies of scientific cell manipulation is inextricable from the new potential for the mutability of the image associated with digitization and global cybercultures.⁸ Braidotti's insistence on the significance of technological intersectionality in contemporary cultures demands a consideration of the interface between genetic engineering and digital manipulation.⁹ This broad challenge from Braidotti might be posed as a more modest question here about how the relationship between cinematic and scientific technologies is configured. Put simply, we might ask what fantasies are imagined through the relationship between cloning and morphing in the cinematic spectacle of the monstrous bodies of the new genetics.

In the opening sequence of *Alien Resurrection* discussed above, the monstrous potentiality of cell development in an age of genetic engineering and cloning is given a visual equivalence in the continuously mutating flow of images. These cells and organs achieve this sense of mutability through a morphed flow of continuous visual transformation. As we watch this fluid movement of changing cell formations, the threat of the hidden monstrous organs and features repeatedly surfaces and disappears, offering us only a cautionary glimpse of the more dangerous and disturbing spectacle hidden in the golden flow. This extended exploration of cell mutation thus uses one technology (morphing and digital special effects) to imagine another (cloning), producing an analogy between artistic and scientific innovations. Each form had previously guaranteed its own particular authenticity (the cell contained the truth of ancestry and inheritance; the photographic image authorized the visual evidence of the historical event). The potential distortions shown through this digitized credit sequence convey the dangers of a time when scientific intervention into cellular life threatens to produce monsters as well as marvels.

According to Braidotti, the mutability of these new technologies that intersect and reinforce each other so powerfully is closely related to their monstrous associations. She writes 'there is indeed a distinct teratological flair in contemporary cyberculture, with a proliferation of new monsters which often merely transpose into outer space very classical iconographic representations of monstrous others'.¹⁰ For Braidotti, 'the monstrous or teratological imaginary expresses the social, cultural and symbolic mutations that are taking place around

8 Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity 2002)

9 For a discussion of the cultural significance of the pixel, see Sarah Franklin Celia Lury and Jackie Stacey, *Global Nature, Global Culture* (London: Sage 2000) pp 60–66

10 Braidotti *Metamorphoses* p. 179

the phenomenon of techno-culture . . . [and] visual regimes of representation are at the heart of it'.¹¹ What she calls the 'teratological imagination' takes its form in the context of the current conjuncture of genetic engineering with the cybercultures of globalization

Teratology is the scientific study of monsters and marvels, sharing its name with the study of the malignant tumours which develop from an unfertilized germ (egg or sperm) cell: the teratoma. As cancers of the egg cell, teratomas 'have the capacity to differentiate into any of the specialised cell types of the adult body... [and] are often filled with clumps of matted hair, protruding lumps of bone, cartilage, bronchial and gastro-intestinal epithelium and even teeth'.¹² These bizarre, parthenogenetic, disordered mixtures of malignant cells and tissue derange other more general cultural categories: they mix together life and death, health and illness, the normal and the pathological, the human and the monstrous.¹³ The 'teratological imagination' named by Braidotti is populated with the horrors evoked by such disordered mixtures of monstrous proportions. Since it details cell behaviour and misbehaviour, the history of teratology offers a powerful iconographic repertoire for contemporary cultural representations of genetic manipulation.

A fascination with teratomas and with excessive cell growth in *Alien Resurrection* combines a longstanding generic preoccupation with monstrous bodies with more recent fantasies about genetic engineering and cloning. The iconography of cell mutation draws upon the teratological imagination to convey a new sense of fascination with deviant bodies at a time when the scientific manipulation of cells might produce more terrifying distortions of the human form than nature itself.¹⁴ *Alien Resurrection* draws quite explicitly on an iconography of monstrous bodies from medical science to give shape to its fantasies of failed genetic offspring. In other words, biological deviance of the organic variety (disease) is used to imagine the terrifying visual monsters that might result from a technological interference with biology (such as genetic engineering).

The significance of the teratological dimension of the spectacle of cellular mutations and distortions in the credit sequence is not fully elaborated until much later in the film, when Ripley encounters the display of monstrous, failed clones numbered one to seven. Following her successful cloning as host body for the infant alien on the spaceship Aurega at the beginning of the film, Ripley's 'baby' is removed from her chest and allowed to mature. The scientists responsible allow Ripley to remain alive out of curiosity. A pirate ship, the *Betty*, arrives with illegal cargo (live bodies for hosts in which to breed the aliens) and a motley crew including Call, a robot who passes as human, is programmed for compassion and is trying to destroy the aliens (and Ripley, too, if necessary). Once the aliens

12 Melinda Cooper, 'Regenerative medicine: stem cells and the science of monstrosity', unpublished paper (2002), p 10. This paper offers a fascinating discussion of the history of the scientific study of teratomas in relation to the development of contemporary stem cell research looking in particular at the history of the conceptualization of the normal and the pathological in teratology and teratogeny.

13 In a woman a teratoma may imitate pregnancy in so far as it has the capacity to produce the cells of all the different organs in the body. Thus, unlike many tumours, teratomas have a fascinating and yet grotesque characteristic of foetal resemblance. This is why teratomas are also called 'monstrous births'. For a more detailed discussion of teratomas see Jackie Stacey, *Teratologies: a Cultural Study of Cancer* (London: Routledge, 1997).

14 As Rosi Braidotti has shown in *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Thought* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), teratology, or the scientific study of monsters, was the forerunner of contemporary embryology.

begin to reproduce and destroy the humans, the remaining members of the crew from each spaceship combine and are led in flight by Ripley. It is at this point in the film that Ripley confronts her own commodification as genetic experiment

Delaying the remaining crew's flight from the ship, Ripley pauses to compare her own numerical tag (the number eight tattooed on her lower inside forearm) with the sequence one to seven on the entrance to the laboratory in which the clones are housed. Ripley's connection to her horrific predecessors is established through the numerical sequence, which, mimicking the technology which has produced them (DNA as genetic sequence), suggests Ripley's 'enslavement' to the capitalist scientists who plan to make money from this experiment. The concentration camp-style numbering on Ripley's arm confirms her status as object of exchange in these capitalist relations, a 'meat by-product' (as her creator calls her) that has no rights to personhood. In this spectacle of the inhumanity of science, echoes of Holocaust eugenic experimentation combine with analogies to slavery and are mapped onto contemporary fantasies about genetic engineering. In an earlier scene we see Ripley become the 'white slave' forced to eat and move with her hands and feet in shackles to limit the violent and unpredictable outbursts through which she expresses her resentment at having been 'resurrected'. Following its much debated replicant predecessor *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), cyborg enslavement produces a historical reversal which appears to separate slavery from race: in *Alien Resurrection* slavery is repositioned 'beyond race' as the political potential of the brutality of the combined ruthlessness of science and capitalism.¹⁵ Created by a multiracial group of scientists, Ripley's whiteness cannot protect her from exploitation, manipulation and objectification; white slavery becomes the ultimate horror in the fantasy of a genetically engineered future.

Part gallery, part laboratory – a kind of unnatural history museum – the scene of this scientific exhibit displays the spectacle of failed genetic experimentation like a chamber of horrors. A closeup shot from inside the room back through the glass, showing Ripley's face with the numbers one to seven in reverse across her forehead, indicates the distant trace of an ancestral memory of her shared genetic inheritance with the previous clones. The bodies of the dead clones one to six are displayed in giant test tubes, suspended in a transparent solution, lit from above by a yellowish spotlight, and raised slightly above or slightly below eye-level for human inspection. This yellow/golden colour combines with the music from the credit sequence to return us to the spectacle of the teratological grotesque with which the film began. Although very different in style, there is a shared sense of fluidity to both scenes. In the credit sequence the cellular forms mutate to reveal unexpectedly monstrous distortions, in this scene, the continuous camera movement

¹⁵ This argument is developed in Kaja Silverman's reading of *Blade Runner* 'Back to the future' in *Camera Obscura*, no. 27 (1991), p. 115. For a comprehensive analysis of this film see Scott Bukatman, *Blade Runner* (London: British Film Institute, 1997).

around the space both tracks and displays Ripley's trance-like journey through the monstrous history of her genetic ancestry. These transparent storage columns are spaced intermittently throughout the room, requiring Ripley to move amongst her predecessors as she slowly takes in the shocking visual evidence of her own prehistory. Physical proximity is indicative of her genetic connection, underscored by gestures of touch: Ripley's hand touches the glass of the test tube containers as she passes, giving a visual sign of her empathy with her ancestors. The shots alternate between medium-shots and closeups displaying the grotesque bodies of the clones and long-shots placing Ripley (and later Call) amongst them.

This gallery of genetically engineered monsters shows the spectacle of failed recombinant DNA. As a combination of Ripley and the alien, they are transgenic clones whose half-human, half-alien status takes the visual shape of corporeal distortion. As in the credit sequence, the visualizations of these genetic experiments take the forms of recombinant images which use aspects of Ripley/Weaver's facial features (hair, jawline, forehead, nose) morphed with monstrous exaggerations from elsewhere. Numbers one to six include foetal forms, tumour-like protrusions, misplaced organs and distortedly extended features. The first resembles a foetus-like, coiled-up old man whose spine continues into a tail, suggesting a prehuman phase in evolutionary development. Another has witch-like elongated fingers of alien proportion. Like the teratomas in the credit sequence, these monstrous births have inappropriate cell differentiation visible on their bodily surface: one has a spine or rib-like bone formation running down the side of its leg; another has doubled organs – two mouths with enormous teeth. The attempt to interfere with normal cell division has produced excessive cell growth: one has an extended skull doubling the size of its head and another has a breast-like form growing out of its side. Ripley/Weaver's features are shown as visual traces in the contours of the clones' faces, echoing the forms which tie her to their fate. Like Ripley, one of the clones has a mass of black hair which floats in a Medusa-like formation in the liquid suspension, a closeup shot of this clone prefigures a later one in which Ripley is shown in a similar pose in the underwater battle against the aliens. In one shot taken from in front of the test tube through the yellow-coloured liquid, Ripley, standing behind it, appears to accompany her dead sibling inside the vessel. In their pathological deformities, the clones mirror Ripley's own deviant cellular composition.

Ripley's connection to (and empathy with) the clones culminates in her encounter with number seven, the most human of her ancestors. She is the only one who is still alive and breathing (or gasping); she is just able to utter the words 'kill me'. Bearing the traces of the previous failures (inappropriate bone formations puncturing the skin, breast mispositioned, elongated limbs), linked up

to medical machines that are keeping her alive, and chained like a slave to the table on which she lies, number seven is the ultimate cyborg horror of genetic experimentation. In an extended act of violent outrage at the brutality of genetic science, Ripley torches first number seven and then all the other clones, destroying the entire laboratory. As the flames hit the glass test tubes they shatter, and the liquid solutions explode and ignite, destroying the imprisoned clones. Cutting between shots from above, behind and below, and using tilts to convey the distorting force of the attack, the spectacle shifts from the stasis and containment of the science museum display to a cathartic action sequence of elemental chaos as the golden glow of the fire combines with the reflective capacity of the liquid and the glass. As Ripley backs out of the space she has decimated, the sound of her exhausted panting echoes the sound of clone number seven for one last connecting moment before she and Call rejoin their human crew.

16 Harold Varmus and Robert A. Weinberg, *Genes and the Biology of Cancer* (New York: NY: The Scientific American Library, 1993), p. 29.

In its display of unrestrained cell division, excessive organ growth and deformed bodies defying the biological laws of 'form, control, unity of design and function',¹⁶ *Alien Resurrection* produces a fantasy of genetic experimentation as the teratological grotesque. Like the malignant forms that are their prehistories, these failed clone bodies exhibit the deathly self-destruction of both pathological and artificial cellular malfunction. The horrors of cloning, of turning the culture of the copy into a biological possibility, are expressed through the display of excessive cell growth associated with malignant disease in which the body fails to recognize and expel the monstrous proliferations within. Biological laws of cellular division are defied in both cloning and in malignant disease: the cells trick the body into misrecognition, cellular similarity appears as difference with fatal consequences. The biological deviations of excessive cellular production of both teratomas and of cloning combine in these monstrous figures to produce a spectacle of the threat of too much sameness in its most material bodily form. Such disregard for the foundational requirements of difference at the biological level is shown to have deadly effects in these failed clones. Moving reproduction out of the human body and into the laboratory threatens to bring the monsters of nature home to roost in the cloned bodies which are unnaturally, or too closely, related to their original host. Ripley's connection to these monstrous bodies, both her siblings and her predecessors, traces the horrors of the new forms of kinship and relatedness in the age of cloning. The horrors evoked by such disordered teratological mixtures thus take on a new dimension in the current cultures of the new genetics.

Deviant relations

According to recent cultural analysts, our conceptions of normal and pathological bodies, and of our relatedness to our kin, have been profoundly transformed by the new genetics.¹⁷ What has been called the 'new genetic imaginary' is a fantasy landscape inhabited by artificial bodies whose futures might be controlled and extended, whose new forms of kinship might be unthinkable, and whose diseases, and indeed desires, might be reprogrammed or 'designed' through the 'helping hand' of scientific intervention.¹⁸ We live in the age of the Human Genome Project, a three-billion-dollar enterprise to map the genetic makeup of homo sapiens, an age in which DNA is increasingly used as an explanation for human disease and as a means of detecting deviant and criminal behaviour. The so-called 'geneticization of culture', or 'the genetic turn', as explored in José van Dijk's *Imagination Popular Images of Genetics*, refers to the ways in which popular understandings of the new genetics pervade ideas about the human, the body and disease in fiction, film and advertising as well as in more general public debate. In their study of the gene as a cultural icon, Dorothy Nelkin and Susan Lindee have argued that the gene has become a cultural icon whose determining power is acclaimed across popular forms: 'In supermarket tabloids and soap operas, in television sitcoms and talk shows, in women's magazines and parenting advice books, genes appear to explain obesity, criminality, shyness, directional ability, intelligence, political leanings and preferred styles of dressing'.¹⁹

Fantasies of reproductive technology, such as in-vitro fertilization, have pervaded popular culture in the form of a technological fetishism, involving a disavowal of the mother's role, an omnipotent fantasy of procreation without the mother, enabling science, as Sarah Kember has argued, to fulfil the desire to father itself.²⁰ Cloning pushes such imaginings in new directions, placing the cell as the unit of life at the heart of the troubling, yet fascinating, potentialities of scientific experimentation. Cloning is only one aspect of genetic engineering, and yet, according to Donna Haraway, it has a strikingly powerful grip on the popular imagination, because it is simultaneously 'a literal, a natural, and a cultural technology, a science fiction staple and a mythic figure for the repetition of the same, for a stable identity, and for a safe route through time seemingly outside human reach'.²¹

Cloning films arguably belong to the generic tradition of doubling that has pervaded the history of science fiction films. As J.P. Telotte has argued, we might trace the continuities in the cinematic preoccupation with doubles and their threat to the individuality of the human form from *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931) through *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Don Siegel, 1956) to *Blade Runner*:

17 For important analyses of popular cultural constructions of the gene see Dorothy Nelkin and Susan Lindee *The DNA Mystique: the Gene as a Cultural Icon* (New York, NY: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1995); Jon Turney, *Frankenstein's Footsteps: Science, Genetics and Popular Culture* (New Haven, NJ and London: Yale University Press, 1998); José van Dijk *Imagination Popular Images of Genetics* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998).

18 The term 'the new genetic imaginary' is taken from Sarah Franklin's chapter 'Life itself' in Franklin et al., *Global Nature Global Culture* pp. 188–277. For a discussion of images of the 'helping hand' of science in new genetic interventions, see Sarah Franklin 'Flat life: conception after Dolly' paper delivered at the 'Biotechnology, Philosophy and Sex' Conference, 12 October 2002, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

19 Nelkin and Lindee *The DNA Mystique*, p. 2.

20 Sarah Kember, 'Feminism, technology and representation' in James Curran, David Morley and Valerie Walkerdine (eds), *Cultural Studies and Communication* (London: Edward Arnold, 1996) pp. 229–47.

21 Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (London: Routledge, 1989) p. 368.

22 J.P. Telotte 'The double of fantasy and the space of desire', in Kuhn (ed.), *Alien Zone*, p. 154

'as exemplary texts, these films are commonly concerned with the human body as a double, and thus as an emblem of man's [sic] own blind space disconcertingly brought into contact with the specular'.²² For Telotte, this preoccupation with the threat of the monstrous double is part of a general cultural anxiety about the other side of desire:

the horror genre typically conjures up monstrous 'copies' that, we would prefer to think, have no originals, no correspondence in our world. Their anomalous presence, however, fascinates us even while it challenges our lexicon of everyday images.²³

23 Ibid., p. 153

Since many science fiction films are about the potential monstrosity of scientific and technological innovations made in the name of the advancement of humanity, and since science fiction films, as Mary Ann Doane has argued, repeatedly explore the relationship between the technological and the maternal (often showing the latter as the contaminator of the former), *Alien Resurrection* conforms to its generic predecessors.²⁴ Read through its own generic inheritance, this film rehearses the preoccupations of body horror films more generally: these films are concerned with 'the torture and agony of havoc wrought on a body devoid of control'²⁵ and with 'the ruination of the physical subject'.²⁶ By exploring the potential monstrousness of the new genetics, *Alien Resurrection* might seem to be the logical next step in the evolutionary cycle of body horror/science fiction films. Following this trajectory, the film's representations of cloned bodies might be analyzed as symptoms of contemporary anxieties about new life forms and new forms of life, and about who will control their conception and reproduction.

24 Mary Ann Doane 'Technophilia technology, representation and the feminine' in Mary Jacobus Evelevyn Fox Keller and Sally Shuttleworth (eds) *Body/Politics Women and the Discourse of Science* (London Routledge, 1990), p. 170

25 Philip Brophy, 'Horrority -- the textuality of contemporary horror films', *Screen*, vol. 27, no. 1 (1986), pp. 2–13, p. 10

26 Pete Boss, 'Vile bodies and bad medicine' *Screen* vol. 27 no. 1 (1986), pp. 14–25, p. 18

27 Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine*

28 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror an Essay on Abjection* (New York, NY Columbia University Press, 1982)

This generic reading can be extended to confirm Creed's influential psychoanalytic theory of body horror films as the ritual fantasy banishment of 'the abject',²⁷ in which she reworks Kristeva's essay on abjection, *Powers of Horror*.²⁸ As has been widely rehearsed, the process of abjection is that through which we expel those unwanted objects which remind us of our origins and our fate. These undesirable objects are those which make us shudder, make our flesh creep, turn our stomachs; those which have the capacity simultaneously to fascinate and revolt. According to Creed, it is the female body, and in particular its reproductive capacity, which has been placed as the abject source of the narrative threat that must be resolved. It is the problem of separating from the maternal body that is endlessly rehearsed in body horror films, since, it is argued, we can never fully expel these reminders of the mutability of our boundaries, for the abject haunts the subject long after it has been expelled. And thus, Creed argues, the threat of being reabsorbed into the maternal body continues to preoccupy cultural fantasies and fictions: the womb represents the utmost in abjection. For example, in *Aliens*, Creed argues, the narrative strategies combine with a

generic iconography of the womb to form the heart of the 'monstrous feminine':

woman's womb is viewed as horrifying ... because ... it houses an alien life form, it causes alterations in the body, it leads to the act of birth. ... The womb ... within patriarchal discourses ... has been used to represent woman's body as marked, impure and a part of the natural/animal world.²⁹

29 Creed *The Monstrous Feminine*, p 49

Extending life beyond death, doubling the possibility of existence, undermining the authenticity of individuality (individual originally meaning indivisible), cloning threatens many of the foundationalisms of contemporary culture. As such the clone might appear to be the ultimate in abjection, if, as Kristeva argues, it is 'not the lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection ... but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.'³⁰ And Ripley, as not only a clone, but one who was engineered as a body already pregnant with the alien species, might seem to represent the literal embodiment of the full grotesque potentiality of the monstrous-feminine in the age of the new genetics. After all, for Kristeva, the abject can never properly be banished and repeatedly returns to haunt the subject at the borders of its existence. Ripley might thus be seen as the literal embodiment of the constant threat of the abject. If we analyze the ways in which genetic engineering is represented in *Alien Resurrection* through an iconography which draws quite explicitly on a repertoire of associations between the clone, the monstrous birth and the diseased female body, we might extend Creed's argument about body horror to an exploration of 'the genetic abject'.

30 Kristeva *Powers of Horror*, p 4

Both generic and psychoanalytic theories here seem to point to the ways in which *Alien Resurrection*, like its predecessors, rehearses a fantasy expulsion of monsters in order to reassure us of our bodily and individual integrity. In the light of these approaches, the scene in which Ripley destroys the monstrous clones one to seven, discussed above, could be read as a pivotal moment in the narrative drive towards humanizing Ripley in order to remove her from the place of the abject. Here, she and Call prove to be 'more human than the humans'³¹ on the ship, when they put clone number seven out of her misery, and then go on to destroy clone exhibits numbers one to six. Number seven is the abject figure who crosses the boundary between life and death, bringing death into life, and whose last breath calls Ripley to reimpose this distinction and to kill her. For Ripley, number seven is her previous self, who bears an uncanny resemblance to her embodiment as number eight; too proximate to her current incarnation, number seven represents the problem of identity as excessive sameness. In destroying number seven, she is, in part, destroying herself. Rehearsing her previous self-destruction at the end of *Alien 3*, Ripley revisits the narrative closure which failed

31 Debhora Battaglia points out that the advertising slogan of the Tyrell Corporation (the company that produced the replicants in *Blade Runner*) is 'More Human than the Humans' Battaglia, 'Multiplicities', p 507. On the human/replicant relation, see also Silverman 'Back to the future' pp 113–15

to deliver its promise of total alien annihilation. In her destruction of the clones one to seven, who reflect Ripley's deviant biology back to her in their cellular excesses, Ripley kills herself over and over again.

But it is Ripley and Call's emotional response to number seven's suffering that distinguishes them from the unfeeling humans. As Battaglia has pointed out, 'It is not uncommon in films of human doubles that narratives of passing expose the insufficiency of dominant-culture originals'³² In destroying her predecessors, Ripley demonstrates a disgust for the excesses of genetic experimentation by eradicating the abject bodies these have produced. In the process she also becomes more fully human herself by becoming an individual. Since the notion of being human in part depends upon the assertion of the singularity and originality of each human subject, in destroying the traces of her replication (numbers one to seven) Ripley arguably begins to leave behind her cloned status. Ironically, she becomes more fully human by killing her clones out of a sense of compassion, and her decision not to kill the human scientist responsible for this misery serves as a further sign of her humanity, as well as of the humanness which he lacks.

Despite the repeated display of the proliferation of sameness in the teratological monstrosities which appear to give cinematic shape so perfectly to what we might think of as 'the genetic abject', it has been argued, however, that *Alien Resurrection* undoes, rather than confirms, Creed's reading of body horror. As Catherine Constable's important reading of the film suggests,³³ the narrative closure ultimately signals the failure to banish the abject successfully, thus refusing the spectator the generic pleasures of the previous films in the series. Moreover, the figure of Ripley as transgenic clone confuses the conventional dichotomies that the genre of body horror has historically relied upon. The problem with the representation of Ripley as a transgenic clone in *Alien Resurrection* is that she is both the threat and the hope, both human and alien, and as such she can neither be destroyed like her offspring and her predecessors, nor can she straightforwardly be the heroine and the object of our identification. Constable insists that since the clear boundary between the normal and the monstrous body cannot be maintained in *Alien Resurrection*, the continuing validity of Creed's suggestion that horror film is a ritual expulsion of the abject is called into question.

For Constable, *Alien Resurrection* defies the psychoanalytic model of the abject not only because of its narrative structure, but also because of its presentation of intersubjective models of embodiment throughout the film. For example, in the scene at the beginning of the film in which the scientists surround the giant test tube which displays the morphing figure that will be Ripley reborn as transgenic clone, Ripley is connected backwards and forwards in time to her 'kin'. She is linked to the past through the child character Newt to

32 Battaglia 'Multiplicities' p. 509

33 Constable 'Becoming the monster's mother', p. 190

whom Ripley played surrogate mother in *Aliens* (the voiceover repeats Newt's words in that second film in the series: 'My mommy said there were no monsters, no real ones anyway, but there are'), and to the future through the mother alien who will grow up and reproduce and to whom Ripley has just given birth, making her both the monster's mother and sibling.³⁴ Constable's reading of the complex dynamics of identity, memory and temporality in this scene demonstrates the limits of the psychoanalytic model.³⁵

Ripley's identity is thus set up as an intersection point. She is altered by giving birth to the queen just as the queen will later display the nature of Ripley's bequest to her. Within a traditional psychoanalytic model, these points of intersection would constitute a breakdown of the oppositional structures of identity. On this model, Ripley's new-found memories would indicate a collapse of the division between human and monstrous, conflating Ripley with the alien queen. However, the beginning of *Alien Resurrection* is complicated in that the alien's capacity for instinctual memory also provides Ripley with a means of remembering Newt. The alien DNA is therefore reconfigured within Ripley to provide access to a specific relationship as well as to activate a species memory. The capacity for instinctual memory does not dissolve Ripley into the alien queen, but sets up a point of intersection between the two distinct characters.³⁶

For Constable, the transformation of Ripley's memory through her bodily mutation establishes a series of fluid exchanges between Ripley, Newt and the alien queen, demonstrating the need for a new model of subjectivity based on interrelationality. 'Theorizing the possibility of productive points of intersection between self and Other, human and monstrous, requires an entirely different model of subject formation. The morphing figure in the tube stands for the possibility of change through productive encounters with otherness.'³⁷

This argument is reinforced if *Alien Resurrection* is contrasted with its predecessors. Whereas in *Aliens*, Ripley and the queen meet in a battle between the good mother (human) and the bad mother (alien) in which they fight to the death to protect their offspring, in *Alien Resurrection* the distinctions between human and non-human, human and animal, human and machine have collapsed entirely. This is most vividly shown in two scenes. First, Ripley again abandons her flight from the ship with the crew and is drawn back to the queen's body as it writhes in pain, struggling to give birth, she is viscerally called back as if through an embodied memory of shared corporeality, and her movement becomes more insect/animal-like in response to her sense of shared pain. Once hailed, Ripley is shown literally submerging herself in the viscous substance surrounding the queen. With an almost orgasmic abandonment of self, Ripley reconnects with the alien as if she is returning home to a familiar

34 For a discussion of the incestuous character of the complex forms of desire between Ripley and the various aliens in the film see Church Gibson "You've been in my life so long I can't remember anything else" p. 49

35 For a discussion of the commodification of memory in science fiction films see Bukatman, *Blade Runner* pp. 77-80

36 Constable 'Becoming the monster's mother', p. 191

37 Ibid. Constable draws here upon Christine Battersby's reworking of Luce Irigaray's theories of feminine subjectivity through the notion that in the potentiality to birth another, the female subject might be used to provide a new model of interrelatedness as (potentially) being more than one and less than two through the connection to another's bodily formation. See Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity* (Cambridge: Polity 1998)

38 Claudia Springer, *Electronic Eros Bodies and Desire in the Postindustrial Age* (London: Athlone Press, 1996), p. 61

39 Constable, 'Becoming the monster's mother', p. 196

40 *Ibid.*, p. 197

maternal body, as Claudia Springer argues, 'By associating a deathlike loss of identity with sexuality, pop culture's cyborg imagery upholds a longstanding tradition of using loss of self as a metaphor for orgasm'.³⁸ This incestuous sexual merger with the alien queen is followed by the birth of an alien biped who destroys the queen and pursues Ripley as she begins to regain her human consciousness and reconnect with the human endeavour to escape. In the escape shuttle Ripley has to expel the queen's (and thus her own) offspring, and, as Constable argues, 'the way in which the monstrous child is dispatched by Ripley plays into the theme of intersecting identities that structure the film' Ripley and the infant are shown in closeup, exchanging intimate caresses and mutual sniffing to convey a sense of love and loyalty through their shared genetic non-human tie. This intimate mother-child reunion that 'prefaces the infant's death', argues Constable, 'means that the traditional dispatch of the final monster cannot be regarded as a triumph',³⁹ and contrasts strongly with the final destruction of the monsters in the first two films:

In *Alien*, Ripley dispatches the threat, securing the Symbolic space of the craft. In *Aliens* the battle between Ripley and the queen is a fight for species survival in which the human is pitted against the insectual. By *Alien Resurrection* the oppositional relation between the human and the inhuman has been completely reconfigured to form a series of intersecting potentialities.⁴⁰

Constable's reading makes a convincing case about the problem of the psychoanalytic theory of abjection for understanding the body horror of *Alien Resurrection* insofar as Ripley literally embodies the impossibility of the requisite expulsion of the alien so vividly dramatized in the previous films in the series. However, the film's central preoccupation with the threat of excessive sameness rehearses the desire for markers of difference, for a bounded self, for an individual body, and as such, it is constantly haunted by the abject, even as it demonstrates the problem of the expulsion of its monstrous manifestations. Rather than rejecting Creed's theory of abjection as inappropriate or outmoded, I would suggest instead that in the repeated rehearsal of its failed mechanisms there is an almost *over-presence* of the abject in *Alien Resurrection* that requires further exploration.

In this rehearsal of the thwarted desire to banish the threat of the abject, the film plays with generic convention and audience expectation. Whilst the ultimate expulsion of the monster is indeed fraught with ambiguity, as Constable suggests, the impossibility of narrative closure around the alien banishment foregrounds this expectation precisely *as* generic convention, bringing to the surface the formal moves of its predecessor alien films. The film's self-conscious commentary on its own generic conventions are

immediately evident in the scene discussed above. In some senses, this adult figure in-vitro appears initially to be 'the clean and proper body' that Kristeva writes about: floating peacefully in a transparent blue watery liquid, perfectly proportioned, clearly contoured, hairless and unblemished, Ripley is the spectacle of the body as pure sculpted form. As Ripley is morphed into being on the screen we are presented with the ultimate fantasy of individuality – there is no visual evidence of attachment to the mother since the navel is almost invisible. But the image of this perfect adult body morphing in vitro is accompanied by the uncanny voiceover referred to by Constable ('My mommy said there were no monsters, no real ones anyway, but there are') Whereas Constable emphasizes the scene's significance in terms of cross-species memory and intersubjective embodiment, I would stress its *playful* reference to *Aliens* for audiences familiar with the series. For this moment juxtaposes the innocent, yet knowing, child's comment with the literal making of Ripley's body as a perfect image, deceptive in its surface perfection as Ripley is already pregnant with the alien and is about to become the monster's mother. In appearing as the perfect clone, Ripley is thus transformed from her previous role as good mother of Newt, to whom Ripley became the protective surrogate mother and for whom she risked her life in *Aliens*, to her new, if unwilling, status as mother of the bad mother – the alien queen. In other words, the voiceover takes on an increasingly ironic status as this perfectly formed body is shown to be not simply connected to the alien when the scientists perform a caesarian section to remove the foetal monster from Ripley's chest, but inextricable from her body and her psyche as she repeatedly demonstrates throughout the film that it still resides within her. The pleasing fantasy of perfect individuality suggested by the adult foetus in vitro at the beginning of the scene is thus not only undone by the revelation that Ripley is the apparently human by-product of a barbaric scientific experiment, but is also playfully reversed in that Ripley is then revealed as a transgenic clone, designed by scientists as host mother for her alien infant. Ripley defies the logic of individuality and singularity by combining two species and by being a clone who is both herself and not herself.

This generic self-referentiality is present throughout *Alien Resurrection* in its witty quotation of the shots, dialogue and mise-en-scene of its predecessors. Such self-commentary has crucial implications for how we read the problematization of the abject in relation to the film's body horror. Considered as a form of knowing generic reiteration, not only does the figure of the transgenic clone confound the fantasy of any permanent expulsion of the abject other, but in staging the impossibility of such an expulsion, Ripley can be read as repeatedly enacting the compulsive repetition of abjection itself, thus revealing the form of its foundational mechanisms. As

Judith Butler has argued in relation to the regulatory functions of essentializing gender norms more generally.

When the disorganization and disaggregation of the field of bodies disrupt the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence, it seems that the expressive model loses its descriptive force. That regulatory ideal is then exposed as a norm and a fiction that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe.⁴¹

⁴¹ Judith Butler *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge 1990), p. 136

Following Butler's claim, we might explore the extent to which *Alien Resurrection* troubles the power of the theory of abjection, exposing not only the potential loss of its descriptive force but also the regulatory function which lies at the heart of its theoretical foundations. In this vein, as the transgenic clone, Ripley's rehearsal of the problem of the me/not me boundary could be read as demonstrating its normative imperative but refusing its reassuring reinstatement (however temporary this might be). she remains both human and alien, both organic and technological, both Ripley and not-Ripley. When confronted by Call with the question of who she really is, Ripley replies: 'I am not her' Ripley might thus be seen to represent the technological deviation from the biological norms of reproduction, embodying the impossibility of the expulsion of the abject and, in so doing, exposing its regulatory principles

The structures of abjection, which offered such a powerful account of the appeal of the previous alien films, are pushed to the surface through precisely the failure to instantiate the boundaries around the human subject in *Alien Resurrection*. Butler's challenge to the normative function of theories of the abject in gender identity formation looks at the question of the destabilization of the subject through the loss of a fantasy of internal coherence. She writes

'Inner' and 'outer' make sense only with reference to a mediating boundary that strives for stability. And this stability, this coherence, is determined in large part by cultural orders that sanction the subject and compel its differentiation from the abject. Hence, 'inner' and 'outer' constitute a binary distinction that stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject. When that subject is challenged, the meaning and necessity of the terms are subject to displacement. If the 'inner world' no longer designates a topos, then the internal fixity of the self and, indeed, the internal locale of gender identity, become similarly suspect.⁴²

⁴² *Ibid.* p. 134

For Butler, the question is, 'how does a body figure on its surface the very invisibility of its hidden depth?'⁴³ Posing the question in this way, we might investigate how the suspect relations of sameness Ripley embodies are displaced onto its surface. What happens when Ripley's 'inner world' as transgenic clone 'no longer designates' a recognizable 'topos'? We might extend Butler's argument to look at

⁴³ *Ibid.*

the 'redescription' of intrapsychic processes, such as abjection, in terms of the 'surface politics of the body'⁴⁴ or, rather, in terms of the encounter between the surfaces of two bodies, such as Ripley's and Call's. To what extent do the dynamics between them externalize this problem of the impossible conflicts of transgenic replication within Ripley's cloned body? In the final section of this essay, I shall examine how Ripley's 'hidden genetic depth' as the embodiment of excessive sameness is given form through her relationship with Call – the robotic double of Ripley's younger incarnations. These dynamics between Ripley and Call enact the problem of Ripley's 'suspect internal topos', and it is here that the film's playful and knowing treatment of the embodiment of the relations of sameness are most fully elaborated.

Deviant desires

It is not only Ripley's shifting status as clone, or her problematic genealogy as displayed in the spectacle of the monstrous births, which cast her as deviant in *Alien Resurrection*, it is also her association with deviant desires. For what Constable passes over in her analysis is the extent to which Ripley's fluid and mutable identity in the film is established through her association with lesbian desire. This association works through the mutual reinforcement of both the intertextual star image of Weaver and the homoeroticism of her 'interrelationality' with Call in the film. Thus, whilst Constable is right to insist upon the confusion of the subject/object/abject categories of psychoanalytic theory in producing a close reading of Ripley's 'monstrous maternity', this is further complicated by another structuring relation: the heterosexual/homosexual distinction. For, as I shall show, it is precisely Ripley's multiplicity as transgenic clone and as the mother of another species that is deployed to establish a homoerotic dynamic with Call.

Celebrated as 'the androgynous action heroine' who defied the traditional Hollywood conventions of feminine passivity, Weaver became a lesbian icon during the 1980s and 1990s. Through her participation in violent action, her use of heavy weaponry and her technological know-how, Weaver's star image was associated with an unusual physical strength and stature and a heroic agency exceptional for a woman in Hollywood cinema (figure 1).⁴⁵ Keen to separate such 'gender trouble' from any lesbian association, publicity around Weaver's star image makes much of her 'softer femininity' and of her heterosexuality offscreen, as in the following example in *Film Review* in 1997:

appearances are deceiving. The classically trained actress is softer and more delicate off-screen than the characters she has

⁴⁵ For further discussion of action heroines, see Carol Clover *Men Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: British Film Institute 1992), Yvonne Tasker *Spectacular Bodies: Gender Genre and the Action Cinema* (London: Routledge 1993) and *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1998). Ros Jennings 'Desire and design: Ripley undressed', in Tamsin Wilton (ed.), *Immortal, Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image* (London: Routledge 1995) pp. 193–206; Chris Holmlund, *Impossible Bodies: Femininity and Masculinity at the Movies* (London: Routledge 2002).

Fig. 1.
Sigourney Weaver in *Alien Resurrection* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997). Production companies: 20th Century Fox/Brandywine Productions.



played. She is no aloof and self-assured woman with an air of command.

I have come to embody feminine strength and confidence, but in real life my movie portrayals reveal little of how I feel about myself. . . . It was an odd thing being thought of as the female Harrison Ford because I'm really not a fan of scary movies. In fact, I'm very squeamish about horror films. I miss half of them because I look away at all those scary parts. My husband has to tell me when it's okay to look at the screen again.⁴⁶

In contrast to this self-proclaimed squeamishness, in *Alien Resurrection* Ripley is almost parodically encoded for strength and power with her curly black hair swept back, her padded vest, her tense body and her 'just you try it' look: she is a kind of heavy-metal, female 'Braveheart', with a touch of the mutability and

⁴⁶ Film Review, December 1997, p. 35

47 For an analysis of Michael Jackson in this video see Kobena Mercer, 'Monster metaphors: notes on Michael Jackson's "Thriller"', *Screen* vol. 27, no. 1 (1986), p. 27

48 For an analysis of androgyny and sexuality in science fiction films, see Janet Bergstrom 'Androids and androgyny', in Penley et al (eds), *Close Encounters: Film, Feminism and Science Fiction* pp. 33–62

49 *Film Review*, p. 33

artificiality of Michael Jackson in his 1982 pop video *Thriller*.⁴⁷

Weaver's previous associations with lesbian desire through her status as subcultural icon are given diegetic elaboration in *Alien Resurrection* through Ripley and Call's highly charged homoerotic relationship. Both Ripley and Call are represented as androgynous figures whose interactions with each other have an erotic energy.⁴⁸ Their shared status as scientific inventions sets them apart from the human crew and it also produces an intense intimacy between the two female stars. This intimacy not only plays upon Weaver's status as a lesbian icon, but also upon the associations between cloning and homosexuality from the common nickname for a particular gay male cultural style (the clone) to the more general assumption that same-sex desire is inextricable from narcissism, commonly understood as a desire for oneself or one's own image.

In the light of these broader cultural associations, we might argue that Ripley is cloned in more ways than one in *Alien Resurrection*. Ripley is a transgenic clone and she is also confronted with Call, who could be read as a further Ripley/Weaver clone. In this sense, Call represents the visual enactment of Ripley's hidden genetic depths. Call also duplicates the position of protagonist and multiplies the structures of identification in the film. Ryder brings Weaver face to face with a previous incarnation of herself. The stories about the dynamics between the two female stars contribute to their construction along the axis of similarity and imitation. In the same article from *Film Review*, Weaver is cited as taking pleasure in having been Ryder's role model. Having firmly established Weaver's heterosexuality, the strength of attachment between older and younger stars can be introduced through the discourse of the schoolgirl crush: 'She [Weaver] is proud of her action icon status and touched when . . . [her] co-star Winona Ryder told her that Ripley was her hero. "Winona told me that all through high school, she had slept under a poster of me in *Alien*. I was touched."' ⁴⁹

In the scene in which Ripley and Call first meet, soon after Call has entered the Aurega with the pirate crew, their visual mirroring gives external analogy to Ripley's cloned embodiment. Call (still passing as human) is dressed in a dark grey combat suit like the one worn by Ripley in the earlier *Alien* films. She has blanched white skin, dark, almost black, hair, large eyes and petite nose; she is Ripley's successor and also Ripley's past self (figure 2). The shared whiteness of the two characters here connects them both to each other and to a white ideal of physical perfection: the similar bone structure (high cheek bones) and proportioned features (big eyes, small noses and fine lips) echo each other in their conformity to cultural norms of white beauty.

The homoerotic connotations of this doubling are played out in this arguably parodic sexualized encounter. Ripley is shown as feline dominatrix, playing with her prey as Call struggles to hold her own



Fig. 2
Call (Winona Ryder).

with the older and wiser cyborg. The scene is structured like a sadomasochistic seduction scene in which the two shift roles and power. Entering Ripley's guarded panoptic cell secretly, a closeup low-angle shot from behind Call shows her slowly drawing a knife from inside one of her steel-trimmed leather boots. The low-angle of the shot gives Call a towering physical advantage over the supine, and apparently sleeping, Ripley, who is stretched out in front of her on the floor. Lying on her back with one arm placed above her head in the traditionally feminine position of submission, Ripley appears ready for seduction. She is dressed in a tight, dark leather sleeveless waistcoat whose front lacing has been left open down to breast level.

As Call lifts the opening to her waistcoat with the knife to reveal the long scar between her breasts (from her 'caesarean alien delivery') Ripley seems utterly exposed. The sexual signifiers proliferate: Call has found the entrance to Ripley's body she sought and makes it visible with her phallic instrument (figure 3). But as Call inspects Ripley's body, one deception (Call's entry into the cell with false identity passes) is superseded by another – Ripley is feigning sleep, and moreover, not fearful of death, she invites Call to 'finish the job' and kill her. Taking control of the exchange, Ripley moves into a feline pouncing position and plays with Call's curiosity flirtatiously. In a two-shot, both women kneel facing each other showing their almost identical profiles in mirroring symmetry, and Call asks 'who are you?'. As Ripley replies with her original military title and number, she takes hold of the knife and forces Call to penetrate her hand with it (thus finishing the sexual act she began). Ripley thus tries to produce an identity by rehearsing her formal title as her body is penetrated by Call, who reflects Ripley's previous self.

This violent gesture produces no blood and no pain and offers a double answer to the question of her true identity: she both is and is not Ripley; she both is and is not human. Once penetrated by the knife, Ripley secedes power to Call, who tells her she is not Ripley. As the knife is slowly withdrawn from Ripley's hand she echoes Call's words, 'I am not her', whilst shot in closeup gazing intensely at her younger double, who explains the violent origins of the cloning and the alien birthing process (figure 4). Ripley then takes Call's hand and traces her facial contours with it, as if touching Ripley's skin might provide tangible evidence of her instinctive feeling that the alien is still part of her. The homoerotic physical intimacy of this exchange culminates in a final move: kneeling up,



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.

towering over her tiny intruder, Ripley encircles Call's face with long fingers and claw-like painted black nails. Half caressing, half threatening, Ripley reverses Call's touch. Switching back into dominatrix mode, Ripley grabs Call by the throat, holding her face roughly in her large hands (figure 5). In a pose which imitates the conventional heterosexual prelude to a first kiss (male above, looking down, seizing the female's face in his hands as she gazes up into his eyes), Call submits once again to Ripley's superior strength, is inspected, teased, and violently cast aside when Ripley is done.

This scene establishes an overtly homoerotic dynamic to Ripley and Call's relationship: the emphasis on touching, on looking, on



Fig. 5.

role play and on intimate confessional dialogue combine with the status of Weaver as lesbian subcultural icon to produce a highly sexualized exchange. The use of closeup shots of Call and Ripley's faces as they combine their half-whispered secret knowledge confers an intensity to their communication. The physical resemblance across the generations between the two actors introduces a narcissistic aesthetic of duplication to their intimacy. As Ripley is forced to confront the 'truth' of her deviant ancestry, Call shifts from anger to fear to revulsion and then to compassion in response to the visual evidence of the potentialities of Ripley's body.

This scene clearly rehearses the clichéd associations of physical resemblance with same-sex desire and both of these with cloning.⁵⁰ Such an emphasis on the visual mirroring of Ripley and Call places lesbian desire within a mise-en-scene of excessive sameness: their exchanges throughout the film emphasize their similarity, narcissistic recognition, sibling rivalry and even regressive mother-love. As such, the trouble posed by Ripley's biological deviance as transgenic clone is given external form in her encounter with Call: she is faced with a vision of her own abject duplicity. But these more abject overtones of the 'unnatural' or 'cloying' desire for sexual sameness rather than sexual difference are arguably undercut by the film's self-conscious play with cultural codes of 'passing', in which sexual identity and technological identity are placed in somewhat ironic dialogue with each other.

Ripley and Call are both cyborgs (one a transgenic clone and the other a robot) who can pass as human, and each has to 'come out' as non-human at different points in the film. They share knowledge, emotions and a recognition of their outsider status in relation to the values of masculine science and technology (even though they were created by it). There is even a structural echoing of Ripley's 'coming out' scene with the later one in which Call is forced to 'come out' as a robot. In both scenes, the sexual connotations are explicit: as Claudia Springer has argued, 'collapsing the boundary between what is human and what is technological is often represented as a sexual act in popular culture'.⁵¹ The second of the two scenes reiterates the sexual encoding of the intimate exposure of the other's wound and the penetration of the other's body in the first scene. Like Ripley, Call comes back from the dead when she rejoins the crew, having been fatally wounded in the chest. Just as Call had forced Ripley to admit to her cyborg status in the earlier confrontation, now Ripley reverses the demand. In a gesture that connects directly back to Call's opening of Ripley's clothing to reveal her caesarian scar in this previous scene, Ripley slowly and gently peels back Call's jacket to expose a chest wound seeping with white fluid. Echoing the playfully sexual connotations of the guided penetration of Ripley's hand by Call's knife at their first meeting, Ripley slides her fingers into the wound and rubs the sticky white substance between them as

⁵⁰ For a discussion of gay male cloning cultures Battaglia references John Lauritsen 'Political-economic construction of gay male cloning identity', *Journal of Homosexuality* vol 24 nos 3/4 (1993), pp 221–32.

⁵¹ Springer, *Electronic Eros*, p 61.

⁵² For a discussion of the sexualized use of hands in lesbian films, see Mandy Merck, 'The lesbian hand' in *In Your Face 9 Sexual Studies* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000) pp 124–47

she exits. Just as the status of Ripley's body as non-human was established when Call's knife was inserted into it and neither blood nor pain resulted, so Call's robotic status is first indicated through the penetration of her body by Ripley's hand.⁵² Throughout this scene, Call's lowered eyes, her silence and awkwardness, and finally her tears all indicate a sense of pain and humiliation paralleling the shame surrounding a forced confession of a deviant sexuality.

If Call's exposure as a robot is rendered visible in a scene which replicates the revelation that Ripley is not herself, this mirroring is amplified through her particular style of robotic design. For she is not only a robot but an 'auton': a 'second gen' (second generation), who should have all been destroyed but of whom a few escaped. Like Ripley, who is not a straightforward clone but a transgenic one, combining two species, Call is an auton – a robot designed by robots. Thus both cyborgs share common genealogical patterns: they embody a doubled duplication and have a special relationship to their ancestors (Ripley to the alien, Call to computers); they have been manufactured by forces beyond their control (science and capitalism); and they should be dead (Ripley was forcibly reborn by scientists and Call escaped the destruction of all autons by the government).

Where the associations of homoeroticism with an unnatural attachment to sameness might appear to confirm the normative drive of abjection in *Alien Resurrection*, the reconfiguration of these relations of sameness as technological function pushes such normativity to the surface. The film repeatedly presents the problem of the threat of the abject and then translates it into a technological configuration which displays its formal conventions. One example of this move is the translation of homoerotic intensity into the more general intimacy of shared 'posthuman' technological embodiment in which Ripley and Call's status as robot and transgenic clone connect them through a corporeal and emotional empathy.⁵³ This is most clearly established at the moment when Call is transformed into the ship's computer in the second of the one-to-one scenes with Ripley (in the 'privacy' of the ship's chapel). The connection to the mainframe is possible through a cable hidden in the bible in the chapel (religion now only functioning to serve science); Call extracts the sinewy thread from the port in her forearm and inserts the computer lead like an intravenous needle. After fishing around for a connection, she begins to speak as the computer, named 'father', giving information on the ship's power loss. As Call speaks the computer's commands with her new electronic voice, she enacts what, for Catherine Hayles, is one of the defining elements of the posthuman age: 'the belief that information can circulate unchanged among different material substrates'.⁵⁴ The separation of information from bodies that is performed here reiterates a parallel disjuncture in Ripley's evolution discussed earlier: the dislocation of memories from subjects (Ripley has memories beyond the lived experience of

⁵³ For an analysis of the posthuman see Katherine Hayles *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999). I am grateful to Michael Lundin for letting me read his unpublished paper on *Alien Resurrection* as the presentation of posthuman embodied subjectivity: '(Wo)man-machine-insect posthuman bodies in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Alien Resurrection* and Philip K. Dick's *Ubik*' (2002). This work is drawn from his PhD in progress *Spiders from Mars: refiguring subjectivity in the novels of Philip K. Dick 1953–66* (Stockholm University, Sweden). See also Hurley, 'Reading like an alien'.

⁵⁴ Hayles *How We Became Posthuman* p 1

her previous incarnations). As Michael Lundin has argued, both characters are thus placed within the realm of the posthuman where, citing Hayles, he notes that 'there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals'⁵⁵

55 Ibid., p. 3

The transformation of Call in this scene places her alongside Ripley within a shared frame of posthuman mutability. 'the posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction'.⁵⁶ In a series of shots of sliding doors being released, lights and computers being activated, the camera moves rapidly through the Aurega and into the Betty, offering the visual sense of Call's posthuman ubiquity in her full robotic incarnation, Call can play God. The combination of Call's cyber-knowledge and Ripley's instinctive judgement allows the cyborgs to control the ship and the Betty's shuttle. Together, through their collaborative power, Ripley and Call seem invincible. The homoerotic intimacy between Ripley and Call in this scene is established through the increasing sense of knowledge of each other's technological potentialities; this is not, however, located solely within their bodies, but rather extends beyond them into the realm of the interface itself. Ripley and Call's erotic exchange combines the romantic pleasure constructed around the intimacy of their shared embodied recognition with 'erotic interfacing', which, Springer argues, 'is, after all, purely mental and non-physical; it theoretically allows a free play of imagination'⁵⁷ *Alien Resurrection* thus redefines homoeroticism as a kind of sexual interface in which their mutual knowledge of the technologies of replication and mutation produce their excessive sameness as technological and sexual deviance

56 Ibid.
57 Springer *Electronic Eros*, p. 68

The cloning of Ripley in *Alien Resurrection* produces a sense of horror of, and fascination with, seeing the reverse logic of what heterosexuality was perceived to guarantee: sexual difference, sexual reproduction, embodied maternity and paternity. To disorder these couplings is to threaten the foundationalisms which seemed to ensure the compatibility of biological and cultural reproduction: with the threat to the integrity of individuality comes the threat to the logics of heterosexuality within this queer landscape. As the transgenic clone whose pregnancy continues to connect her to the alien species even after she has given birth, and as the lesbian icon who plays a homoerotic power game with the newly arrived robotic version of her younger self, Ripley is constantly shown becoming someone else through her connections to other bodies. In defining herself against the singularity of the Ripley of previous *Alien* films ('I am not her'), this resurrected Ripley is the not-Ripley or the more-than-Ripley. A

58 For a discussion of the remaking of 'life itself' in the context of the new genetics, see Sarah Franklin in Franklin et al., *Global Nature*, pp. 188–227

59 I am grateful to Imogen Tyler for discussions on these points. For an analysis of the disruptions to psychoanalytic categories produced by pregnant embodiment see her chapter 'Skin-tight celebrity pregnancy and subjectivity', in Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (eds), *Thinking Through the Skin* (London: Routledge 2001), pp. 69–84

60 For an excellent historical account see Hillel Schwarz, *The Culture of the Copy* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1996)

symbol not only of the posthuman but also of a reimagined form of 'life itself',⁵⁸ Ripley's mutating body and shifting identity imitate the cell duplication and division of genetic engineering, producing a fantasy of self-replication which reiterates and problematizes the traditional categories of classification within theories of body horror film.⁵⁹ In its repeated presentation of excessive sameness in its pathological, technological and sexual manifestations, *Alien Resurrection* relentlessly rehearses the impossibility of the expulsion of the abject other. The consequent over-presence of the abject in the film denies the pleasurable fantasy of its permanent expulsion offered by the previous alien films. In the film's multiple refusals of such generic pleasures, the normativity of abjection is both rehearsed and exposed.

In producing a science fiction fantasy of the geneticization of the 'culture of the copy',⁶⁰ *Alien Resurrection* pushes the conventions of its generic inheritance to such limits that it produces excesses that are hard to contain within its forms of closure without displaying an ironic commentary upon its predecessors. If the cloning of Ripley, pregnant with the alien, generates narrative problems for the traditional expulsion of the abject outlined by Creed, then the extension of the genre with this fourth film presents similar problems of duplication. As Constable argues, the film fails to re-establish the traditional boundaries around the human body to secure its integrity in the future. Both biological and cultural reproduction are defined here by the problem of excessive sameness. The biological, technological and sexual forms of deviance in *Alien Resurrection* are all cast as the signs of too much sameness: teratomas, clones and homoeroticism. Authenticity and individuality are called into question, not only by the threat posed by these forms of sameness, but also by the generic self-referentiality of *Alien Resurrection*. As such, *Alien Resurrection* rehearses the cultural analogy of the biological form of reproduction it represents. The audience is offered none of the generic guarantees or reassurances of conventional body horror; instead Ripley and Call, the two cyborgs, save the earth and are the signs of hope for an unknown future. Shown in *Titanic*-like double profile, they brace themselves against the impact with the Earth's atmosphere, and look ahead to the bright new future, signalled through a series of clichéd cloudscape shots. The survivors who accompany them are those whose bodies are coded as the most deviant of the pirate crew: the high-tech weapons expert in the wheelchair, Vreiss (Dominic Pinon), and the criminal thug, Johnner (Ron Perlman), whose ruthless exploitation of others has no limits. The future belongs to the deviants – to the criminals and the cyborgs.

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Affecting legacies: historical memory and contemporary structures of feeling in *Madagascar* and *Amores perros*

LAURA PODALSKY

¹ See Chilean social scientist Martin Hopenhayn's *No Apocalypse Now/No Integration Modernism and Postmodernism in Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), and US-based, Argentine literary critic Francine Masiello's *The Art of Transition: Latin American Culture and Neoliberal Crisis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001) among others.

In the midst of recent discussions of the death of utopias and the crisis of the Left in Latin America,¹ a number of films demonstrate a similar preoccupation with the legacies of radical political projects and revolutionary militancy. Some, including *Tango feroz* (Marcelo Piñeyro, Argentina/Spain, 1993), *Alma corsária* (Carlos Reichenbach, Brazil, 1993) and the widely distributed *Que É Isso, Companheiro?/ Four Days in September* (Bruno Barreto, Brazil/USA, 1997), are set in the 1960s and 1970s and explore various types of resistance, from the rebellion of a rock musician against the strictures of bourgeois normality in Buenos Aires, to the militancy of several Brazilian youths who join the guerrilla group MR8 and kidnap the US ambassador. Others, such as Alejandro Agresti's *Buenos Aires vice versa* (Argentina/Netherlands, 1996) and Beto Brant's *Ação Entre Amigos/Friendly Fire* (Brazil, 1998), are set in the present day and deal with the legacies of that period of revolutionary fervour. Without ignoring the larger social, political and economic changes that ensued, many of these films pay particular attention to the effects that the period had on personal relationships, in other words, they tend to focus on the personal cost of revolutionary ideals. In so doing, such films might be seen as attempts to reinscribe revolutionary projects in light of the dominant neoliberal paradigm in contemporary Latin America. By underscoring the naivete of the

Left's utopian projects to create a more just and equitable society, the brutality of leftwing guerrilla groups as well as the rightwing military, and the way in which individuals were lost, literally and metaphorically, in collective struggles, the films might be said to delegitimize calls for structural change, thus strengthening the neoliberal project even as they seemingly criticize the alienating aspects of market logic.

Yet, as I shall argue, the way in which these films evoke and deploy emotion suggest an alternative reading. This will be shown through the analysis of two specific films set in the 1990s that address the 1960s and 1970s as subtext: Fernando Pérez's medium-length feature *Madagascar* (Cuba, 1994) and Alejandro González Iñárruti's *Amores perros/Love's a Butch* (Mexico, 2000). Pérez's film chronicles the deteriorating relationship between Laura, a woman who came of age during the early years of the Cuban Revolution, and her teenage daughter Laurita, who appears increasingly disengaged from her surroundings in 1990s Havana. As part of its interlocking narratives of life in contemporary Mexico City, the better-known *Amores perros* features a homeless man who is trying to reclaim the family that he lost due to his involvement in a guerrilla group in the 1970s. While *Madagascar*'s dreamy and hollowed-out mise-en-scene attests to feelings of *desarraigo* or uprootedness, *Amores perros*'s inventive cinematography conveys a dread of impending violence that permeates everyday life. As detailed later, the films' emotional engagement with both the revolutionary past and the neoliberal present has much less to do with what is shown onscreen than with how the spectator is situated and how the films resonate with dominant notions of the past, the present, and the relationship between the two (for example, discourses about rising levels of urban poverty and violence in 1990s Latin America and the legacy of state-sponsored terror). In sum, these films are carrying out emotional work as well as or *as part of* their political work; it is this interface between affect, politics and history that I shall explore.

In the process, I engage with the work of Thomas Elsaesser who, along with Marcia Landy, has begun to reexamine the relationship between affect, history and the cinematic form, and to problematize the dominant tendency to denounce the evocation of emotion in historical films as a trivialization of the past.² Elsaesser's lucid and complex essay, 'Subject positions, speaking positions: from *Holocaust*, *Our Hitler* and *Heimat* to *Shoah* and *Schindler's List*', is particularly relevant for the issues under discussion because he speaks of what has often been seen as the limit case of all social trauma (the Holocaust) and of the political and social efficacy of filmic and televisual texts that try to deal with that traumatic past. Elsaesser suggests that attempts to deal with Germany's Nazi past have not been entirely successful in dealing with the issues of

2 This is the case even in the very thoughtful work of historian Robert Rosenstone who himself criticizes his colleagues' traditional denunciation of the representation of history in film as oversimplistic. See 'The historical film: looking at the past in a postliterate age' in *Visions of the Past: the Challenge of Film to Our Ideas of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

3 Thomas Elsaesser, "Subject positions speaking positions from *Holocaust Our Hitler* and *Heimat* to *Shoah* and *Schindler's List*" in Vivian Sobchack (ed.), *The Persistence of History Cinema, Television and the Modern Event* (New York, NY: Routledge 1996) p 172

4 *Ibid.*, p 173

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.* p 174

7 *Ibid.*

8 *M Klein* focuses on a gentile who buys the art collections of Jews fleeing Hitler. Despite the character's morally suspect behaviour, the film encourages the spectator to identify with him up until the moment he is arrested by the Gestapo and loaded onto a 'train with all the Jews who have been rounded up' at which point 'the spectator want[s] to say "But you've got the wrong man he isn't a Jew" - until with a sudden shock one realizes that all the people on the train are "the wrong men" and must acknowledge one's own impotence and 'complicity' *Ibid.*, pp 174-5

complicity, responsibility and guilt, and asks, 'what kinds of affect might possibly "unlock" numbness, apathy, indifference, and reconcile memory and hope, commemoration and forgetting, [and] mediate between pity, sentiment, and shame'.³ Challenging conventional critical paradigms that oppose emotion to cognition with reference to films including Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) and Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), he argues that the evocation of affect in film (and television) can have a mobilizing effect, and invokes the German term '*Betroffenheit*' which roughly translates as "the affect of concern" but in its root-meaning includes "recognizing oneself to be emotionally called upon to respond, act, react".⁴ Elsaesser goes on to explain that the term 'covers empathy and identification, but in an active, radical sense of being "stung into action"'.⁴

Clearly not all films evoke this 'affect of concern' or 'touch a point where the self itself knows and can experience otherness', and Elsaesser suggests that the ability to do so depends upon 'the ambiguous or extreme subject positions [films] are able to sustain'.⁵ He is speaking not only of what is presented onscreen, but also of the relationship established between the film and the spectator. He praises Marcel Ophul's *Hotel Terminus* (1988) and Lanzmann's *Shoah* for 'fill[ing] the mind's eye and ear with voices and presences: they will forever speak of a history for which there is neither redemption or exorcism'.⁶ At the same time, he argues that even as their multifaceted testimonials 'suspend preconceived narrative and explanations' and underscore the incommensurability of having any (number of) representative(s) stand in for those who were killed (that is to say, the inadequacy of any representation to account for what happened), neither of the two films 'threaten[s] the coherence of the viewer's identity'.⁷ In this sense, they fail to revitalize the spectator's understanding of his/her engagement with the past, with the present as historical moment, or with the social body. Elsaesser contrasts the two documentaries to Joseph Losey's *M Klein* (1976), a much more mainstream film about the Holocaust, 'carried along by the processes of fictional identification' between spectators and the central character that employs those very processes to force the spectator to acknowledge his/her own 'impotence [as well as] collusion and complicity' in historical processes like the one portrayed – in other words, to destabilize the spectator's subject position.⁸ For Elsaesser, such mainstream fiction films have a particular advantage in potentially reshaping the spectator's *cognitive* understanding of history and historical processes and of his/her own role in those processes.

Although Elsaesser's attempt to complicate the dominant understanding of the role of affect in film responds to US and European critical traditions, his arguments have a special pertinence for recent Latin American cultural productions. Coming of age in the

aftermath of the New Latin American Cinema, the politically and aesthetically revolutionary cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, Latin American film criticism (particularly as practised by US-based critics) had accepted the way in which radical filmmakers like Glauber Rocha, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino had dismissed early Latin American cinema made during the 1930s–1950s as excessively emotional. Their call to *concientizar el pueblo* was understood as a push to make spectators think, to use their minds when they watched films, to confront them with ‘reality’ by disrupting mechanisms of emotional identification with fictional protagonists; by forestalling narrative closure and, by replacing ‘easy’, escapist pleasures with thought-provoking audiovisual images, among other things.⁹ If the appearance of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s essay ‘Dialéctica del espectador’/‘Viewer’s dialectic’ (published initially in Spanish in 1982) and the work of scholars such as Ana López on melodrama from the early 1990s have complicated this paradigm, the relationship between affect, cognition, and Latin American film remains largely unexplored.¹⁰ Debates have continued to erupt over the ability of particular films, novels, paintings, and so on to deal with the trauma and aftermath of the revolutionary movements and military dictatorships of the 1960s – especially over works that solicit the spectator’s affective engagement through melodramatic conventions and sensationalizing tactics.

The following analysis of the role of affect in Iñárruti’s *Amores perros* and Pérez’s *Madagascar* attempts to problematize those critical traditions. Evoking highly distinct emotional responses and set in different places, these films have a great deal to say about contemporary urban life, about personal as well as social losses, and about the current generation of young adults caught between the politically charged, if corrupt, legacy of the 1960s and postmodern ephemera. Although neither is a historical film per se (that is, one set in the past), they are vitally interested in engaging the recent past and its affective as well as political legacies. As films about the past set in the present, they offer provocative counterweights to the tradition of historical films about revolution specific to both Mexico and Cuba and to the ways in which those films deployed emotion. Classic Mexican films about the Revolution of 1910 like *Flor silvestre*/Wild Flower (Emilio Fernández, 1943) and *Río Escondido* (Emilio Fernández, 1947) often employed melodramatic conventions to stress the affective ties binding the subject to the nation-as-family. In contrast, Cuban films like *Lucía* (Humberto Solás, 1968) and *Primera carga del machete* (Manuel Octavio Gómez, 1968), about the Revolution of 1959 and earlier revolutionary movements, frequently used hyperbolic onscreen acting and disjointed camerawork to disrupt conventional identificatory mechanisms and to hail their audience as performative subject-citizens who must embody their commitment to the nation-state inside and outside of the

9 Their own evocation of emotion was either operatic (as in the case of Rocha) or tightly contained within a larger rationalist argument (as in the slaughterhouse sequence in *La hora de los hornos*), in these ways, the films seemingly prevented their spectators from ‘wallowing in emotion’ and instead forced them to maintain a ‘proper’ aesthetic discourse

10 Gutiérrez Alea was the first to underscore the need for both identification and distanciation. See ‘Dialéctica del espectador’, reprinted in *Hojas de cine. Testimonios y documentos del Nuevo cine latinoamericano*, Volume III (Mexico, DF: Dirección General de Publicaciones y medios, Secretaría de Educación Pública/Fundación Mexicana de Cineastas, AC/Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1988). Ana López and Manuel Alvarado (eds), *Mediating Two Worlds. Cinematic Encounters in the Americas* (London: British Film Institute, 1993).

11 For an incisive analysis of Cuban historical films as well as viewing practices, see Timothy Barnard, *Death is not true form and history in Cuban film*, and Marvin D'Lugo's discussion of the way in which Cuban films promote interpretive communities through 'dramatized onscreen audiences' in 'Transparent women gender and nation', both in López and Alvarado (eds), *Mediating Two Worlds*

theatre.¹¹ As discussed in greater detail below, *Amores perros* and *Madagascar* break with these respective representational conventions and deploy affect quite differently to register the crises of the present in the context of perceived historical crossroads.

In exploring the way in which these films register contemporary social crises and resituate the past, this study will take a cue from Elsaesser and analyze their modes of address – in other words, how they engage the spectator, particularly in the affective realm. After an overview of *Amores perros*'s plot, basic themes, and historicizing thrust, I shall analyze the film's emotional charge and suggest that it has less to do with what we see onscreen (for example, the violence of the dogfights, the pained expressions of the characters) than with its cyclical narrative structure and its literal and metaphoric framing of the action. In terms of *Madagascar*, the film Pérez made just before his more acclaimed *La vida es silbar/Life is to Whistle* (1999), I will examine the emotional work carried out through its ingenious soundtrack and sparse mise-en-scene.

In analyzing two films about the past that are set in the present, this essay will depart from Elsaesser's proposal by exploring how affect participates not only in the construction of popular historical memory, but also in the articulation of what Raymond Williams has called 'structures of feeling'. I will argue that whether or not they destabilize the subject position of the spectator and his/her relationship to history, the two films register an epistemological crisis wherein the past functions as the site of reckoning for contemporary social breakdown. Finally, I will discuss the degree to which these films strengthen and/or question the moral economy and historical sensibility underpinning the dominant neoliberal project. Thus, beyond its analysis of two important Latin American films, this essay attempts to rethink the so-called 'waning of affect' and the death of history in contemporary society.

Horrific acts

Chronicling the occasionally intersecting lives of several residents of present-day Mexico City, *Amores perros* ostensibly has little to do with Mexico's turbulent past. The first episode ('Octavio y Susana') deals primarily with Octavio, a young man who gets involved in dogfighting as a way to escape his violent neighborhood and liberate his battered sister-in-law from his abusive brother. The second episode ('Daniel y Valeria') picks up characters seen briefly in the earlier episode and traces the personal and professional crisis of Valeria, a rich and beautiful model who is united with her married lover Daniel and then loses her leg in a car accident. The final episode ('El Chivo y Maru') examines the life of a tramp living off what he collects on the city streets and earns from contract

assassination jobs. These are tales of tragedy, loss and degradation, about the transitory nature of love in a contemporary cityscape, where connections between human beings are slowly eroded in a dog-eat-dog world.

As with many Latin American films made since the 1980s, *Amores perros* pays great attention to the private sphere. These are intimate stories or, rather, stories about intimacy or the lack of intimacy, shown in the careful detailing of personal habits and mundane routines: where people sleep, what they watch on television, what they eat and whether or not they clean their fingernails. The interior spaces of homes – whether Octavio’s modest, working-class home or El Chivo’s broken-down hovel – are depicted as dark, hermetic, seemingly airless places rather than tranquil locations protected from the hustle and bustle of city streets. This is true even of Valeria’s luxury apartment, located in a high-rise far above street level and adorned with modern art and a lavish photo spread of Valeria herself. Situated directly across from a huge billboard featuring Valeria in an advertisement for Enchant perfume, the light-filled apartment seems to be a testament to her rising success in both personal and professional spheres. Yet during her recuperation from the accident, her home turns into a claustrophobic jail cell where she must come to terms with her changed situation in the world.

In these stories, the home is not an escape from the violence of the outside world, but rather the very site in which hostile actions and petty cruelties are carried out with excruciating familiarity. Although *Amores perros* opens with a fast-paced chase sequence with speeding cars, plenty of blood and gunshots, the film quickly throws us into reverse, returning us to an earlier moment in Octavio’s home. It is there that the chain of events begins that leads, seemingly inescapably, to the public confrontation we have just witnessed. In this originary moment at home, Cofi, the family dog, escapes onto the street, Octavio’s brother Ramiro cruelly berates his adolescent wife, Susana, for letting the dog out, and Octavio tries to defend his sister-in-law. For his troubles, he becomes subject to his brother’s wrathful harangues and his mother’s admonitions not to get involved. Taking place within the confines of their small kitchen, the family conflict is situated between scenes of a dogfight taking place in a nearby building. This sequencing creates an interesting parallel between the two ‘combat zones’ and characterizes Octavio and Ramiro as a pair of vicious dogs engaged in a meaningless battle to the death for the right to rule over an already disintegrating family home.

Yet, as much as *Amores perros* focuses on the dynamics of family intimacy, the interlocking nature of its three episodes and their common dog motif suggest that the film is an allegory depicting Mexico as a family in crisis – a trope traceable at least as far back as films and novels about the Revolution. While all three episodes

discuss the disintegration of families, the first and last episodes pay particular attention to the Cain-and-Abel conflict between the brothers. In the first episode, Octavio and Ramiro's fights escalate from daily verbal clashes into physical beatings. Frenetic montage sequences – like the one ricocheting between shots of Octavio at Cofi's dogfights, Ramiro robbing pharmacies, and Octavio having sex with Susana to the driving beat of a hip-hop song ('Dime qué te sientes . . .') – assault us with brutal acts and betrayals that belie myths about the cohesive nature of the Mexican (and Latin American) family in times of crisis. A later montage sequence, interspersing shots of Octavio and Susana making love on top of the dryer with others of Ramiro being beaten by a group of thugs contracted by Octavio, demonstrates the complete breakdown of brotherly love.¹²

The conflict between Octavio and Ramiro finds a parallel in the final episode where a man named Gustavo contracts El Chivo to kill his swindling business partner Luis, who is also his half-brother. The elevated economic status of Gustavo and Luis suggests that the decay of the Mexican family is not a result of growing levels of poverty as it occurs at all levels of society. The film may indeed be critiquing the moral bankruptcy and personal cowardice of Mexico's upwardly-mobile middle class as it mocks Gustavo's inability to get his hands dirty and kill his brother himself. And, indeed, there are hints of intra-class warfare breaking out as a result of escalating greed and competitiveness in El Chivo's earlier assassination of an industrialist. Yet, given the parallels it establishes in the first and third episodes, the film's critique goes beyond a particular class or social group and is not primarily a denunciation of the current economic situation. Rather, the film's critique is at once more diffuse and more specific, as can be seen in the final episode.

Here we find out that El Chivo's estrangement from his own family (and specifically his daughter, María Eugenia (or Maru), whose apartment he has been haunting) was a result of his participation in a guerrilla group fighting to establish a more revolutionary and just society in the 1970s. Committed to his cause and jailed for his actions, El Chivo agreed to give up any claim to his wife and daughter. Rather than depicting his actions as heroic (as a sacrifice of personal security and happiness for a larger social good), *Amores perros* characterizes it as a solipsistic and futile act of personal hubris and political naivete. El Chivo/Martín himself renounces his political past near the end of the film in a phone message he leaves for his daughter: 'Back then I thought that I had to change the world before sharing it with you. . . As you can see, I failed.'¹³ As the final episode of the film, the story of this family breakdown is given special weight and a type of explanatory authority that casts the radical political struggles of the 1960s and 1970s and, more particularly, the reification of totalizing schemes of

12 The extradiegetic rock ballad playing in this later sequence (speaking of a lover's frailty and the need for honesty) provides an ironic counterpoint to what we see

13 The film initially characterized El Chivo's past actions as criminal, not political, as we hear about them from Leonardo the corrupt policeman who tells another character that El Chivo placed a bomb in a commercial centre, kidnapped people and assassinated two policemen

societal reform, as a major contributor (if not the source) of private and public decay and the breakdown of the Mexican family.

To a certain degree, the film's reworking of Mexico's radical past is somewhat analogous to that which occurred in classic films from the 1940s about the Revolution of 1910. By romanticizing revolutionary struggle just as the Mexican state initiated an industrialization process, a film like *Flor silvestre* (1943) helped entomb revolution as a necessary *antecedent* to contemporary modernization projects even as its melodramatic conventions became a conduit through which to articulate a generalized sense of longing characterized as the affective legacy of *past* losses (rather than as dissatisfaction with the transformation of contemporary socioeconomic structures). Whereas *Amores perros* dismisses revolutionary struggle outright, like *Flor silvestre* it ties uncertainties about contemporary life to past conflicts. Yet, Iñárruti's film is less interested in displacing concerns about contemporary society entirely onto the past than with utilizing its affective register to convey an epistemological crisis that has destabilized the subject's understanding of contemporary society and, perhaps, more importantly, his/her ability to make substantive proposals for a better future.

The art of horror

As suggested earlier, the way in which the film disconcerts the spectator has little to do with what is shown onscreen. The moments of explicit physical violence are startling and graphic, but often quite brief. Nor, I would argue, is the spectator overpowered by the faces of the characters contorted with physical pain or emotional grief (like those featured in the film's publicity). These are certainly affecting elements, but they do not sufficiently account for the type of emotional work performed by the film; this is done by its narrative structure and inventive use of offscreen space.

As discussed earlier, the interlocking stories make *Amores perros* a film about Mexican society as a whole. Each subsequent episode further develops a character or characters depicted only briefly in an earlier episode and, at the same time, gives us glimpses of what has happened to the main characters from earlier episodes. For example, while we see brief shots of Daniel (in his car with his family, or kissing his daughters goodnight) in Episode One, his story only becomes fully developed in Episode Two, which begins as the continuation of a television programme first seen in Episode One by Octavio and his friend, Jorge. In Episode Three we see brief glimpses of what has happened to Octavio, Susana and Ramiro after the car crash that ends Episode One. Rather than showing three discrete groups, the film suggests that everyone's life somehow

affects everyone else's life and that Mexican society itself is spiraling down into a vortex of violence.

However, the significance of the film's narrative structure goes beyond establishing those thematic parallels, as the stories from each episode are not only interlocking, but circular. We see the same events more than once, either from the same perspective (for example, Octavio and Jorge in the car chase at the beginning of the film and at the end of Episode One) or from a different perspective (for example, the car crash from Octavio's perspective in Episode One and from Valeria's perspective in Episode Two). This narrative repetition of particular events has a different effect here than in Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) or even Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), to which many have compared the Mexican film. In *Amores perros*, this narrational technique not only transforms how we think about what we see (for example, what are the causes, what are the effects, who is responsible), but also substantively frames how we perceive those events on an emotional level. Most specifically, it allows us to anticipate – not only foresee, but also 'forefeel' – tragic events such as Valeria's car crash. The circularity or looping nature of the narrative infuses the spectator with an ongoing sense of dread; having seen the tragic car crash once, then twice, then a third time, the film conditions the spectator to be wary, to assume that another encounter with violence is just around the corner, or just around the edges of the next frame.

The looping structure also instils the feeling that there is no escape from tragedy and loss and that any belief in redemption is futile and naive. As the characters from earlier episodes reappear later on, the film initially suggests that they have survived both physically and emotionally the earlier confrontations, but quickly rips away that fantasy. In Episode Three, we see a seemingly reconciled Ramiro and Susana walking on the city streets only to soon thereafter witness Ramiro's death in a failed bank robbery. We find out that Octavio survived the car crash despite serious injuries, but his attempt to reunite with Susana after Ramiro's death and his dream of escaping with her to Ciudad Juárez are once again doomed to fail.

The way in which the film infuses the spectator with a sense of impending doom and lurking danger is greatly dependent on its artful play with the relationship between what is observable and what is not, or between different modes of perception. In a number of ways, the film draws a contrast between what we see and what we feel or 'know' through other senses. As suggested earlier, the horrifying effects of *Amores perros* are less the result of what we see onscreen than of what we intuit, and the way in which the film directs our attention towards what cannot be seen, but only detected by other means.

The film's mechanisms for building suspense depart from the

classic paradigm outlined by Alfred Hitchcock, wherein a film shows something to the audience that the characters do not see or 'know about' (like the villain placing a bomb under a table) and thus pulls the spectator to the edge of his/her seat with the desire to 'tell' the characters what we know. Suspense works differently in *Amores perros*, which teaches us to anticipate coming violence or lurking danger without giving us a privileged view. For example, having seen the image of a bloody dog in the car in the opening sequence and then the initial moments of a dogfight, the spectator senses that Cofi's escape from Octavio's house in the next scene will only end in more violence. Something similar, but more diffuse, occurs with the scenes showing El Chivo watching a variety of people. Having seen that he is a man who will defend his dogs with a machete and having witnessed his ability to carry out a public assassination in the middle of a bustling street, the spectator learns to associate his watchfulness with impending danger. This, in turn, imbues the repeated scenes where he peers at his daughter, just as he visually stakes out the young businessman, with a sense of great unease.

One of the primary ways in which the film toys with the relationship between the knowable and the visible is through its ingenious use of offscreen space. In the sequence where Cofi escapes from the house, the camera presents a long-shot that remains on the doorway to the house even after Susana runs offscreen right to pursue Cofi. The shot's fixity frustrates our desire to travel with Susana, to see where Cofi is going. Having seen earlier evidence of injured and attacking dogs, the spectator can now only imagine what will happen next.

A more sustained example of the unsettling use of offscreen space occurs in the second episode, when Richie, Valeria's beloved Lhasa apso dog, becomes lost beneath the floor of her luxury apartment. Haunted by the periodic sounds of his muffled barks and scurrying feet over several days, Valeria eventually moves from worry to panic – an escalating emotional trajectory that threatens her relationship with Daniel. Her ability to perceive her dog's continuing predicament through aural means alone leads her to imagine Richie suffering not only gradual starvation, but also being eaten by marauding rats. Lost in a dark and fathomless maze, Richie comes to symbolize all of Valeria's latent fears about the end of her modeling career and the uncertainty of her relationship with the still married Daniel. Through its deliberate manipulation of what we see and what we hear, the film manages to draw the spectator into Valeria's feelings of panic, suspicion and paranoia and, in the context of the larger film, position the unseen events occurring beneath the floor as a metaphor for the ongoing suffering and violence underlying society as a whole.

This essay has paid a good deal of attention not only to the major themes of *Amores perros*, but also to how the film makes us feel, because Iñárruti's work gets at what Williams called 'structures of

14 Raymond Williams 'Structures of feeling', in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977)

feeling'.¹⁴ In his effort to understand culture as a process and not as something already crystallized and visible in particular objects (for example, paintings, novels, films), Williams proposes the notion of 'structures of feeling' as a way to get at 'experiences, beliefs, consciousnesses, and sensibilities' that manifest themselves in emergent artistic productions in structured ways. Through this concept, he manages to forego conventional philosophical paradigms opposing thought to feeling.

15 Ibid., p. 135

Williams argues that structures of feeling are 'distinguishable from other social and semantic formations by [their] articulation of presence'.¹⁵ In other words, he is interested in getting at currents of thought-feeling that have not already been named, classified, and boxed-up to serve a variety of aesthetic, social and/or political purposes. For example, he cites the work of Charles Dickens, Emily Brontë and others as having been important for registering generalized sensibilities that were dismissed by dominant Victorian ideology as deviations from the norm, limited to sectors of the population affected by poverty, debt or illegitimacy.¹⁶ Williams is not arguing that the works of these authors articulate a working-class critique of the industrial change (which, according to Williams, emerges only later as an alternative ideology), but rather that, at a particular moment of history, those novels become a privileged register for streams of latent, unsedimented beliefs and feelings.

16 Ibid. p. 125

Iñárruti's film functions in a similar way. In other words, what is most powerful about *Amores perros* is not its slick, postmodern surface (for example, its driving soundtrack, stripped film stock, disjunctive cinematography), but rather the way in which it articulates contemporary structures of feeling about the true horror of contemporary society. Premiering in an age of escalating urban crime in Mexico City and growing economic inequalities, *Amores perros* transmits the feeling that violence, loss and conflict are constitutive elements of everyday life, as illustrated by several scenes in which a shot of a violent act is directly followed by a closeup on a plate of food. This is a tale about the mundane – about people's pets and what they eat – not about state-sponsored terrorism, the ravages of current economic inequalities, political corruption, the breakdown of moral principles in a Catholic nation, or the artificiality of the media – though these are all touched upon. Without defending the film's 'realism', I am arguing that it evokes the dull ache of lived experiences, despite the fact that the film is quite ideologically and politically conservative.¹⁷

17 Here I depart from Williams's theorization of structures of feeling that point towards its progressive potential.

Dead spaces

If the horrifying violence of *Amores perros* stirs up feelings of disgust, fear and horror, a film like Pérez's *Madagascar* works

18 For an overview of Pérez's work see Beat Bortol, 'Moving to thought: the inspired reflective cinema of Fernando Pérez' in Ann Marie Stock (ed.), *Framing Latin American Cinema: New Critical Perspectives* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

quite differently. It is a much quieter film, chronicling a young girl's affective 'disconnection' from her family and society as well as her mother's feeling that she has lost her ability to dream.¹⁸ Unlike the stylistic flash and rapid pace of Iñárruti's film, *Madagascar* pursues a much more lyrical, contemplative aesthetic. Yet, like *Amores perros*, it is a story about a family on the verge of a breakdown set against the backdrop of a decaying cityscape; it, too, is a personal story with social implications. Within the context of the family drama, both films question the meaning and legacy of the revolutionary projects of the 1960s and, most importantly, articulate structures of feeling. Within the context of Cuban cinema, *Madagascar* is a unique film for its preoccupation with the interior life of the subject and for its suggestion that psychic crises are linked to the process of instituting revolution as a collective struggle.

Pérez's film focuses on the world-weariness of Laura, a university physics professor, and, more particularly, the growing tensions between Laura and her daughter Laurita. At the same time as Laura is finding less and less satisfaction in her professional life, her relationship with Laurita is becoming more and more strained. Laurita shows little interest in school or her immediate surroundings, and dreams of traveling to Madagascar because, as she tells her mother, 'es lo que no conozco' ('I know nothing about it'). Her mania for rock music transmutes into a fixation with 'great' art and, later, into a devotion to evangelical Christianity. Her changing obsessions and disjunctive emotions flummox her mother, who admits in voiceover that she does not understand why Laurita sometimes cries and sometimes does not. Scenes showing Laurita's initial affective disengagement from her mother and surrounding social institutions (specifically her school and the nation-state) are followed by others where we see her sobbing uncontrollably as she listens to 'Con te partiré' ('It's Time to Say Goodbye') and peers at a painting in a museum. Laura herself continually teeters on the edge of hysteria as she repeatedly screams at her daughter, in ever less successful efforts to penetrate Laurita's self-contained, somewhat solipsistic demeanour and seemingly selfish disregard for wider social norms.

The film avoids 'diagnosing' Laurita's changing interests and wildly oscillating emotions, leaving any concrete explanation elusive. However, it does suggest that the tensions and affective disjunction present in Laurita's family are part of a larger dynamic. At several points in the film, we see groups of people chanting the word 'Madagascar' – most notably in one particular sequence in which innumerable young adults stand with their arms outstretched on the roofs of apartment buildings throughout Havana. Pictured as crosses or as antennas, the people reach out for something unknown; their bodies are isolated, separate, but their words signal their common

search for something beyond themselves and beyond their immediate surroundings.

To a certain degree, *Madagascar* locates this search as a generational issue felt most acutely by young adults – as visualized in the scene described above or as indicated in the final dedication of the film to the director's three children. However, the parallels it establishes between Laurita and Laura (who by the end have exchanged roles) as well as the presence of older adults, particularly Laurita's grandmother, chanting 'Madagascar', suggest that the 'problem' is not limited to a single age-group but permeates Cuban society as a whole.

In quite specific ways, *Madagascar* is a meditation on the lost promise of the 1960s and the uncertainty of the future in the early 1990s. Laura frequently muses on the failings of fellow university professors like Mercedes, who was to have been the greatest researcher ever in her field, yet who now merely repeats the same classes over and over again. As Laura ponders in voiceover: '¿Qué pasó? Nadie sabe lo que pasó' ('What happened? Nobody knows what happened'). Laura's growing disillusionment with what has been achieved in the last thirty years is most evident in a scene in which she looks at an old photograph from the 1969 May Day celebration. Reminiscing with her mother about the fun she used to have with a friend (who later married an Italian billionaire and left the country), Laura's laughter abruptly stops when she is unable to locate herself in the crowded picture. Taking out a magnifying glass, she searches the photograph asking, '¿Dónde estoy yo? ¿Dónde estoy yo?', 'Dios mío' ('Where am I? In God's name, where am I?'). Framing the photograph in an extreme closeup through the distorting power of the magnifying glass, the film suggests that the self has been lost in the social and that the pursuit of greater equality overlooked personal fulfillment and, at worst, treated difference as deviance. Similarly, these themes are underlined in comic fashion in Pérez's *La vida es silbar*, when a teacher makes her young students recite the word 'I-GUAL-DAD' (e-qual-i-ty) again and again and again until they 'get it right'. Although *Madagascar*'s lyricism and elliptical narrative discourage us from a narrowly sociopolitical reading, its swipes at hollow revolutionary rhetoric are quite obvious as it defends Laurita's disinterest in "flags, emblems" or preaching about "conciencia".

The film attempts to capture and transmit the characters' alienation in two main ways: through the inventive use of asynchronous sound and a sparse mise-en-scene. Unlike *Amores perros*, which engages the spectator in a structure of feeling through the manipulation of offscreen space (that is to say, through what is not visible), *Madagascar* plays with what we do see and hear by 'hollowing out' both the sound and the image tracks. The film opens with a sequence that crosscuts between closeups of people on bikes riding through the

streets of Havana and extreme closeups of Laura being examined by a doctor. Although Laura's voiceover accompanies the shots of her, only vague or muffled sounds of horns, voices and music are audible during the shots of people on the street. As a subsequent shot shows the doctor examining Laura's ear, the film seems to link the distorted sounds on the street with Laura's 'ailment', suggesting that we were perceiving the world as Laura does. At the end of the film, we return to the doctor's office where Laura's statement that 'everything has returned to normal' is belied by her subsequent comparison of herself to a violin that is out of tune and cannot quite catch on to what is being played, a musical metaphor that becomes central to *La vida es silbar*.

Our visual perceptions are just as important to drawing us into Laura's understanding of the world. Shot through a telephoto lens, the closeups of the bicyclists in the opening sequence isolate the figures against a blurry foreground and background. Just like the emptied-out soundtrack, the images visualize Laura's sense of alienation as a feeling of distanciation from her contemporaries and of being out-of-touch with her surroundings. In other words, the opening sequence of the film plays with our sense of depth, a sense that is central to our understanding of reality and that is at once visual and auditory, to communicate the character's affective disjunction.

The film's arrangement of space is particularly important in this regard. As evident in a later sequence in which Laura is honoured for her contributions to the university in an open-air ceremony, the film presents Havana as a vacant wasteland and uses the mise-en-scene to unmask the celebratory language of officialist discourse during the so-called 'special period'. The final 'frozen' moment of this scene manages not only to underscore the absurdity of declaring triumphs ('cuando hay empeño, hay logros'/'When there is effort, there is achievement') in the context of such obvious material devastation, but also to amplify Laura's feelings of alienation by laying over the sonorous notes first heard at the beginning of the film. The vacant, decaying spaces in *Madagascar* are important registers of the deterioration of material conditions of Cuban society at large, but the devastated homes and public plazas also function as metaphors for the psychic impoverishment of individuals.

The deployment of the ruined cityscape as metaphor of the contemporary crisis in Cuba can be seen in numerous contemporary films, including Pérez's own *La vida es silbar* (1999), Gutiérrez Alea and Tabío's *Fresa y chocolate* (1993) and even Wim Wenders' *Buena Vista Social Club* (1999).¹⁹ However, the clearest resonance is with the work of younger filmmakers like Enrique Álvarez (*Sed* [1991] and *La ola* [1995]), and more particularly, Jorge Luis Sánchez, who has served as Pérez's assistant director on a number of films including *Madagascar*. In his short documentary *El fanguito*

19 This exploration of the cityscape is not entirely new as it was a recurrent motif in the work of Tomás Gutiérrez Alea at least as far back as his 1968 classic *Memorias del Subdesarrollo*. See Ana López 'Memorias of a home mapping the revolution (and the making of exiles?)' *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* vol 20 no 1 (1995), pp 5-17.

(1990), Sánchez examines the persistence of poverty, racism and marginalization in contemporary Cuba through a series of interviews with residents of a slum on the outskirts of Havana and echoes the critique found in Sara Gómez's 1974 film *De cierta manera*. The devastated cityscape becomes even more important in another of his shorts, *Un pedazo de mí* (1989), that presents interviews with a number of young adults (called *frikis*) who find solace in US and British rock music. The film uses its sparse mise-en-scene in inventive ways to capture the young men's sense of alienation and marginalization as they walk through half-finished apartment buildings or construction scaffolding on the streets of the city. Attesting to the economic hardships experienced by these young men, the mise-en-scene also speaks, in quite poetic ways, about their feelings of emotional isolation and abandonment and about the absence of affective ties to their own families or to the larger society.

To a certain degree, films like these might be seen as a response to contemporary economic conditions on the island and, more specifically, as an implicit critique of the increasingly visible disjunctions between urban renovation projects aimed at attracting more tourists and the increasing physical degradation of surrounding neighbourhoods.²⁰ At the same time, the lyrical representation of space in the work of younger filmmakers such as Sánchez as well as in the more widely recognized films of Fernando Pérez is evidence of something else – an emergent aesthetic interested in capturing not only people's thoughts about contemporary life, but also their emotional states, their sense of somehow being disconnected, out-of-synch – spatially and temporally disengaged – from their surrounding environment and society itself. This feeling of *desarraigo*, of being uprooted and afloat, is best captured in *Madagascar* by Laura and Laurita's constant movement from one house to another. Their inability to find a stable home or, more generally, a place in which they feel at home gestures towards the unsettled and unsettling sensibilities underlying Cuban 'reality'.²¹

While uprootedness has been a theme of numerous recent Cuban films such as *Miel para Oshún/Honey for Oshun* (Humberto Solás, 2000) and *Vídeo de familia* (Humberto Padrón, 2001), most of these works have linked that feeling almost exclusively to the issue of exile and to those living outside of the island or to those on the island who feel the loss of friends and family who live abroad. *Madagascar* is unique in the way that it posits this uprootedness (of which physical exile is one manifestation) as a constitutive element of the revolutionary experience wherein the individual has become unmoored during a restructuring process grounded in collective identity and solidarity. Its indictment of the Revolution is consequently much harsher than the critiques present in countless other Cuban films. Whereas it has become commonplace for Cuban

20 After the end of the Soviet subsidies in the early 1990s, tourism once again – as in prerevolutionary days – became one of the central pillars of the Cuban economy. For a discussion of subsequent urban renovation projects – see Roberto Segre, *América Latina, fin de milenio. Raíces y perspectivas de su arquitectura* (La Habana: Artes y Literatura, 1990).

21 Cuban film critic Juan Antonio García Borrero calls 'the search for a certain intimate emotivity – another of the most recurrent characteristics of Cuban cinema in the 1990s (my translation)'. See 'La utopía confiscada (De la gravedad del sueño a la ligereza del realismo)', in *La edad de herejía (Ensayos sobre el cine cubano: su crítica y su público)* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2002), pp. 169–94.

films to poke fun at officialist discourses about revolutionary triumphs and to underscore what the Revolution has not yet achieved, *Madagascar* points to the Revolution's constitutive costs, to what may be the unavoidable loss of such commitment to the social good.

Rather than suggesting that *Madagascar* is an anti-revolutionary film, I am highlighting its humanism and the way in which its contemplative aesthetic and emotional work interpellate the spectator as a historical subject differently to other Cuban films. Cuban historical films have traditionally encouraged their spectators to see the Revolution of 1959 as the culmination of a long line of previous rebellions against injustice and to see themselves as the guardians of such a heritage. As Barnard has argued, an unfortunate consequence of this otherwise refreshing effort to 'sting' the viewer-subject into action has been to avoid contentious issues of contemporary society.²² In contrast, *Madagascar* invites the spectator to 'tune in' to the affective dissonances of contemporary life for what they reveal about how any grand scheme of society must not disregard the notion of the individual.

²² Barnard, 'Death is not true' pp 235–40

Sentio, ergo sum

I want to conclude this essay by returning to some of the issues brought up at the beginning by presenting some final thoughts on how the emotional address of *Amores perros* and *Madagascar* responds to a sense of crisis about contemporary life and about cinema's ability to represent what is happening. In the aftermath of the 1960s, with the appearance of numerous dictatorships, growing levels of censorship, and ongoing financial difficulties, filmmakers learned to 'speak other languages' by going into exile and speaking to audiences outside the bounds of the nation, or by staying at home and either refraining from explicitly political critique or speaking through allegories or oblique references.²³ Even after the much heralded 'return to democracy', there were few fiction films that directly addressed the dictatorships of the 1960s–1980s. Part of the problem faced by filmmakers and other artists has been to represent what cannot be seen (the disappeared) or that which defies representation (torture). Another, even more thorny issue – particularly given the military's continuing political power in many countries even during democratic administrations – has been how to challenge spectators to engage in a process of self-examination about their own stake in the violence that took place²⁴ as well as in ongoing struggles over the myriad of issues left unresolved by the return to democracy. In other words, the rise of neoliberal paradigm and the relative paralysis of the Left have been accompanied by a representational crisis.²⁵ How does one talk about systems of

²³ For a fine study of films made in Argentina during the military dictatorship (1976–83) see Sergio Wolf, 'El Cine del Proceso Estético de la muerte', in Wolf (ed.) *Cine argentino. La otra historia* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Letra Buena, 1992).

²⁴ Almost without exception films like *La historia oficial* have dealt with those who were 'witnesses' to the battles between guerrilla groups and the military. By encouraging their spectators to identify with these 'unknowing' bystanders like *La historia*'s protagonist Alicia the films failed to promote any critical examination of each viewer-subject's own stake in the violence that took place.

²⁵ For a discussion of these issues in relation to the USA and Europe see the articles by Hayden White and others in Sobchack (ed.) *The Persistence of History*.

oppression (such as widespread political corruption, neocolonialism) in the aftermath of the failed utopian revolutionary projects of the Left? How does one denounce growing economic inequalities without chasing the skirts of the latest neorealism? How does one talk about collective sensibilities and not telescope down into the struggles of seemingly 'representative' individuals? As suggested by Kathleen Newman, the need to move beyond the moralizing of the traditional Left (and in cinematic terms, the New Latin American Cinema) and its embrace of facile cultural nationalism is particularly evident in the work of younger filmmakers²⁶

²⁶ Contemporary Argentine cinema', unpublished paper presented at 'Crossing Borders Symposium on Latin American Film' Notre Dame University, 9–10 November 2001 and 'Democracy and film narratives: the legacies of the New Latin American Cinema', unpublished paper presented at the annual conference of the Society for Cinema Studies Denver 23–26 May 2002

Directors like Iñárruti and the older Pérez (who is particularly engaged with the younger generation of Cuban cineastes) have responded by proposing an aesthetic of 'presence', where sociopolitical critique is secondary to altering our perceptions. *Amores perros* gestures towards what is visibly inaccessible and, at the same time, detectable. It registers an exhaustion with political debate and an extreme disenchantment with the paradigms of the Left even as the film seemingly criticizes the inequalities and ephemerality of neoliberalism. *Madagascar* is less definitive in its rejection of the political legacies of the past and yet forces us to address the affective price that has been paid for revolutionary change by hollowing out our perceptions and unmooring us from the immediacy of sensorial impressions, or common sense(s).

The films do not entirely unsettle the subject position of the viewer, at least not in the way theorized by Elsaesser. They do not shock the spectator into recognizing the inadequacy of his/her own moral economy or complicity in particular historical processes. Nor do they encourage the spectator to reimagine his/her relationship to the community. *Amores perros* in particular limits its articulation of the social to the recurrent metaphor of the family. While both suggest that the path to the future is uncertain (*Amores perros* closes as El Chivo walks off into a hazy, sun-cracked mudflat, and *Madagascar* as Laura and Laurita walk their bicycles into a tunnel), only the latter engages the spectator in the process of imagining a different future through the lines of identification it has forged between Laura and the spectator.

Nevertheless, in their affective mode of address, both films problematize the very knowableness of the present by disrupting and reorienting the spectator's perceptions: *Amores perros* by questioning the epistemological primacy of the visual realm, and *Madagascar* by playing with our sense of depth. The attempt by Iñárruti's film to recuperate the deep uncertainties it has articulated and thus its complicity in the neoliberal paradigm, lies not in its gesturing towards past errors,²⁷ but rather, primarily, in its moral economy in its call to honour one's family, one's brothers-in-the-nation, as the basis of future redemption. Although *Madagascar* also highlights family breakdown, it does not draw the same metonymic connection

²⁷ The film provides a warning about radical projects through the character of El Chivo, the former political militant, who is the only character able to recognize the detrimental effects of systemic violence on basic human relations. Such critiques of revolutionary struggle are particularly curious in the context of Mexico, where the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) has, since 1994, offered a highly innovative alternative to the totalizing projects of societal transformation characteristic of radical movements from the 1960s and 1970s

between family and society. Its historical sensibility is also different and goes beyond its critique of the limitations of revolutionary projects. The past is made present in Pérez's film in its residual liberal humanism, a stance that clashes with the type of individualism promoted by neoliberalism (subject as constituted by the market) as well as with the Marxist formulations of Ché Guevara and Julio García Espinosa, who argued that the fullest realization of man would occur through a true commitment to the revolutionary process and the social body.

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- 1 Charles Barr 'Introduction amnesia and schizophrenia', in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: Ninety Years of British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), pp 1–29, Andrew Higson 'Re-presenting the national past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film' in Lester Friedman (ed.) *British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: UCL Press, 1993), pp 109–29
- 2 Richard Dyer 'Heritage cinema in Europe', in John Caughie and Kevin Rockett (eds) *The Companion to British and Irish Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), pp 186–7
- 3 Claire Monk, 'Sex politics and the past: Merchant Ivory, the heritage film and its critics in 1980s and 1990s Britain', MA thesis, British Film Institute/Birkbeck College, 1994, Claire Monk, 'The British "heritage film" and its critics' *Critical Survey* vol 7 no 2 (1995) pp 116–24, Claire Monk 'Sexuality and the heritage', *Sight and Sound* vol 5, no 10 (1995), pp 33–4, Andrew Higson 'The heritage film and British cinema' in Andrew Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Cassell 1996) pp 233–48, John Hill, 'The heritage film: issues and debates', in *British Cinema in the 1980s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp 73–98, Claire Monk, 'The British heritage-film debate revisited' in Claire Monk and Amy Sargeant (eds), *British Historical Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2002) pp 176–98, Pamela Church-Gibson, 'Fewer weddings and more funerals: changes in the heritage film' in Robert Murphy (ed.) *British Cinema of the 90s* (London: British Film Institute, 2000) pp 115–24, Andrew Higson 'Heritage cinema and television', in David Morley and Kevin Robins (eds) *British Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) pp 249–60
- 4 Higson 'Re-presenting the national past', p 111

A pattern of inheritances: Alan Bennett, heritage and British film and television

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The heritage debate and the role of heritage cinema within British cinema is key to an understanding of the 1980s and 1990s. The heritage cinema debate can be broadly summarized as being initiated by Andrew Higson, following Charles Barr's initial application of the term to British films from the 1940s such as *Henry V* (Laurence Olivier, UK, 1945).¹ In the wider context of European cinema Richard Dyer offers a useful definition of the characteristics of the heritage film. Dyer proposes that the heritage film consists of 'a text set in the past drawing upon a canonical source from the national literature and comprised of period costumes, decor and locations carefully recreated'.² Higson's formative position on the heritage film has been subsequently disputed and then qualified, following Claire Monk, who proposed alternative means of reading the heritage film.³ What is notable about the positions taken is less the argument that spectators might or might not read a heritage film according to gender and sexuality, than how the terms of the debate within British cinema initiated by Higson in 1993 remain uncontested. Higson views the films as symptomatic of cultural developments in Margaret Thatcher's Britain in the 1980s.⁴ This was a period of national economic decline, high unemployment and the sense that British society was more diverse than official versions of national identity suggested. These changes were accompanied by the promotion of private enterprise during the 1980s which, as John Corner and Sylvia Harvey argue, occurred in close relation to the growth of heritage

5 John Corner and Sylvia Harvey
 'Mediating tradition and
 modernity: the heritage/enterprise
 couplet' in John Corner and
 Sylvia Harvey (eds), *Enterprise
 and Heritage: Crosscurrents of
 National Culture* (London:
 Routledge, 1991), pp 45–75
 p 46

6 Monk 'Sexuality and the
 heritage'

7 Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of
 Memory Volume I: Past and
 Present in Contemporary Culture*
 (London: Verso, 1994), Gill
 Davies 'The end of the pier
 show', *New Formations*, no 5
 (1988), pp 133–40, David
 Lowenthal *Possessed By The
 Past: the Heritage Crusade and
 the Spoils of History* (New York:
 NY: The Free Press, 1996)

8 National Curriculum History
 Working Group, 'Final report',
 London 1990 pp 10–11 quoted
 in Samuel, *Theatres of Memory
 Volume I*, p 261

9 Patrick Wright 'Heritage clubs
 slug it out', *The Guardian*, 4
 February 1995, p 29

facilitated by the National Heritage Acts of 1980 and 1983.⁵ Against this background the heritage film debate produces a dichotomy in which the generic heritage film is read within the national political context outlined by Higson and then challenged first by oppositional reading and second by the suggestion of the post-heritage film.⁶ One of the consequences of this critical framework is that the meaning and cultural sources of the 'heritage' that constitutes heritage cinema continue to be assumed and taken for granted.

Less confirmatory cultural and historiographic accounts of heritage, which suggest how the heritage debate within British cinema might begin to be extended, are to be found outside the confines of film and television studies.⁷ The debate about heritage in the wider arena of historical and cultural studies opens up the historiography of heritage and the cultural process that constructs it. The terms of argument that emerge from this literature are potentially generative for the relation between heritage and British cinema. For example, Raphael Samuel's *Theatres of Memory* highlights the 1990 National Curriculum Working Group's careful delineation of the issues at stake when attempting to pinpoint the meaning of heritage:

we have been careful to minimize the use of the word 'heritage' because it has various meanings and is in danger of becoming unhelpfully vague. For historical purposes the word 'inheritance' may be more precise in its meaning, implying 'that which the past has bequeathed to us'. While all people in Britain partake to a greater or lesser extent of a shared 'inheritance' they also have their own individual, group, family, etc. 'inheritances' which are inter-related. The study of history should respect and make clear this pattern of inheritances.⁸

The benefit of this insight lies in the suggestion that the meaning of heritage can be broken down through the idea of inheritances that occur at levels other than the national. This idea of inheritance suggests an adjustment of focus to take in those sources of the past that are passed on, and prefigure a full understanding of the dominant version of national heritage. The cultural sources of the inherited past could include the significance of home, family and childhood as ties of attachment that, according to Samuel, warrant historical significance. Thus, consideration of what is passed on as an inheritance is considered not necessarily in isolation from, but in connection with, the national past. A key question follows from Samuel's argument however: to what extent is a personal inheritance shared, and how does it relate to the construction of the national heritage that has framed the study of heritage cinema? Samuel's relativizing position encourages a 'history from below' approach to the historiography of heritage and has attracted vociferous opposition from Patrick Wright.⁹ But it is Corner's and Harvey's summary of

the argument that pinpoints most effectively the issues which arise from Samuel's position in *Theatres of Memory*:

Nationalist nostalgia might well serve to construct via sentiments of *inheritance*, a sense of the National Present perfectly suited for use as a departure point for an 'enterprising' National Future . attempts to rework or to replace the presently dominant and successful forms of heritage will have to offer more than alternative, 'real' histories They will have to speak to that much broader restructuring of identities, desires and social relationships.¹⁰

¹⁰ Corner and Harvey, 'Mediating tradition and modernity' p 46

The terms of the debate suggested by Samuel and Corner and Harvey encourage a more extensive mobilization of the constitutive terms that form the meaning of 'heritage' that could be brought to bear on not only the study of British film but also of British television. Higson has clearly marked the genre of filmmaking that corresponds with the nationalist nostalgia that Corner and Harvey associate with the political context of Thatcherism. Higson also goes on, following Samuel, to note the possibility of other films as diverse as *Comrades* (Bill Douglas, 1987), *The Fool* (Christine Edzard, 1990), *Hope and Glory* (John Boorman, 1988), *A Private Function* (Malcolm Mowbray, 1984) and *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (Terence Davies, 1988) that are set in the more recent past and democratize the genre through different pleasures and identifications.¹¹ Despite this suggestion that a more expansive construction of heritage might be possible, the type of film that is usually discussed in the context of heritage has remained restricted to those adhering to the defining terms of the heritage film. The historical sources of inheritance suggested by Samuel and Corner and Harvey's caution towards propositions of alternative heritage remain undeveloped within the debate about heritage cinema.

¹¹ Higson, 'Re-presenting the national past' p 128

The broadening of the term 'heritage' is continued by Susan Pearce's suggestion that a sense of heritage incorporates a wide range of sources that are part of the formation of self-identity.

The notion of cultural heritage embraces any and every aspect of life which individuals, in their variously scaled social groups, consider explicitly or implicitly to be a part of their self-definition.¹²

¹² Susan Pearce, 'The construction and analysis of the cultural heritage: some thoughts' *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, vol 4, no 1 (1998), pp 1-8, p 2

Samuel's sources of inheritance and Pearce's insistence upon self-definition are manifest in those British films such as *Comrades* and *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, in which versions of heritage are constructed from autobiographical sources. Phil Powrie has marked these films of self-definition as 'rites of passage', and argues that they represent an 'alternative heritage' involving a different articulation of class to the 'bourgeois heritage film'.¹³ Whilst the importance of narratives of self-definition as alternative versions of heritage has been established, the implications of these other

¹³ Phil Powrie, 'On the threshold between past and present', in Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson (eds), *British Cinema, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp 316-26

inheritances in relation to national heritage are still to be examined as part of this project. I would further suggest that different versions of heritage, considered as a part of a cultural formation that articulates the past, rather than a set of texts that recreate the past, can be located within British film and television by isolating prominent individual voice(s) within national culture. One figure who personalizes the idea of heritage and whose work for British film and television is an expression of autobiographical inheritance is Alan Bennett.

Alan Bennett, heritage and the BBC

Bennett occupies the discursive terrain that emerges from the schemas of Samuel and Corner and Harvey. He invokes a particular inheritance of home, family and place, and his articulation of this inheritance has come to represent a version of Englishness that has been characterized by his distinctive voice on broadcasts for the BBC during the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, the significance of Bennett to the idea of heritage is that his articulation of inheritance is not only personal but also identified as part of a national discourse. Bennett's writing for television has consistently looked back to his inherited past. The act of looking back to the past takes place in the present, and from this emerge Bennett's views on the changing nature of the people and the culture that he observes around him. It is this combination of Bennett's personal voice and his public persona as a nationally popular author that is pertinent to the heritage debate and is manifest in the three television documentaries made for the BBC – *Dinner at Noon* (1988), *Portrait or Bust* (1994) and *The Abbey* (1995).

It is clear that the heritage of heritage cinema defined by Higson and by Dyer is something registered primarily through visual display and the setting of a specific period. This definition of the heritage film, which concentrates on an aesthetic of period detail, overlooks those aspects of heritage formed through different articulations such as Bennett's oral evocation of the past. The documentary form provides the means of combining Bennett's recollections of the past, and particular aspects of *his* past, with observations on the present. This inheritance is enlarged by the Bennett persona and his defence of a BBC that represents a national inheritance of what John Street terms 'public service culture'.¹⁴ Bennett's television documentaries explore how the past is experienced, how it is passed on, and the sentiments of inheritance. By expanding the textual frame of heritage, the larger cultural and political context, which gave rise to the political mobilization of National Heritage in the 1980s and to the heritage industry, comes into view as a contested terrain within British film and television.

¹⁴ John Street, *Politics and Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1997) p. 92.

Bennett rose to prominence in the late 1980s and 1990s with the success of *Talking Heads* (BBC, 1988) and the book *Writing Home* (1994) a best-selling autobiographical collection of essays and diaries. During the 1990s Bennett's views concerning the deregulation of public service culture began to assume significance across the media. For example, in *The Sunday Times* in 1997 Bennett condemned the commercial radio station Classic FM for its 'wholehearted endorsement of the post-Thatcher world, with medical insurance and Saga holidays rammed down your throat between every item'¹⁵ In this mode, the Bennett persona represents a defence of the inherited value of public service culture against the commercialization and privatization in the 1980s and 1990s initiated by the Conservative government. The public pronouncements of this persona find a home in the institutional heritage of a Reithian and pre-Thatcher notion of public service which was increasingly absent from the BBC. The publication of the Peacock Report in 1986, and the change of director-general in the same year from Alasdair Milne to the more business-oriented former accountant Michael Checkland, underline the changing position of the national broadcasting institution. At the same time, Bennett continued to enjoy the patronage of the BBC not least because he offered the connotative guarantee of literary gravitas. In addition, Bennett's persona is carried over into his broadcasts for BBC radio and television. The familiar sound of his voice can be connected to a version of national heritage that is formed out of the common culture and shared public of broadcasting.¹⁶ The prestige that Bennett delivers for the BBC correlates with what Sheila Johnston has identified in the context of New German Cinema as 'the author as public institution'.¹⁷ The synergy between the BBC and Bennett as writer, commentator, performer and observer is negotiated in the television programmes by Jonathan Stedall, who directed and produced the first two documentaries.

In 1988, when *Dinner at Noon* was made for the BBC series *Byline*, Stedall was employed by BBC Bristol in the Features Department. He had prior experience of the personal television documentary form through his collaboration with John Betjeman in 1962–63 for TWW (ITV Wales and the West) and then for BBC2. The idea for the personal documentary in an agreed partnership with Bennett was proposed by Stedall to the Features Department, but after leaving the BBC in 1990, Stedall proposed *Portrait or Bust* to BBC Bristol through Scorer Associates, an independent production company comprising ex-BBC documentary and natural history expertise. Following the transmission of *Portrait or Bust*, Bennett was approached by another independent – Holmes Associates – to make a documentary about Westminster Abbey on behalf of the religious programming department at BBC North in Manchester. Bennett made further use of the working relationship he had developed with Stedall on the longer production of *The Abbey*.

15 J. Harlow 'Bennett puts boot into saga louts' *Sunday Times* 5 January 1997, p. 3

16 Paddy Scannell 'Public service broadcasting: the history of a concept' in Andrew Goodwin and Gary Whannel (eds), *Understanding Television* (London: Routledge 1992) pp. 11–29

17 Sheila Johnston, 'The author as public institution', *Screen Education* nos 32/33 (1979–80) pp. 67–78

18 Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality*
(Bloomington, IN: Indiana
University Press, 1991), p. 38

The greater force of internal markets and the ideology of producer choice within television production at the BBC in the mid 1990s is echoed in the documentaries. Bennett repeatedly contrasts a remembered past with the changing and more commercialized present within the frame of public space and the behaviour of the public within these spaces. The spaces featured in the documentaries are a local hotel in Harrogate (*Dinner at Noon*), a provincial art gallery in Leeds (*Portrait or Bust*) and a national centre of religious worship (*The Abbey*). It is at these locations that Bennett combines recollections of his inherited past with the present defined by the changing public behaviour and public culture that he observes around him. The documentaries are a combination of observational and interactive modes. They appear, as Bill Nichols identifies of the observational mode, 'to cede "control" over the events that occur in front of the camera'.¹⁸ The camera and microphone are sufficiently distant to appear to record and overhear conversations within public space rather than to intervene there. The sights and sounds of different locations are combined to form the footage that will be punctuated by Bennett's witness-like commentary, and expository and subjective talk to camera. The emphasis thus placed on Bennett's commentary, littered as it is with anecdotal recollections, shifts the documentaries towards the interactive mode. The familiar and distinctive tone of Bennett's voice is more than a commentary; it connects with the space revealed by the image, with his own carefully chosen words describing what he observes and recollects.

Dinner at Noon

At the opening of *Dinner at Noon*, a long-shot of the front of the Crown Hotel in Harrogate is accompanied by a voiceover which describes the Yorkshire town as 'a place where people used to come in order to take the spa waters. Now it's a leisure break or a conference.' Bennett frames his exposition of the location through the past he recalls verbally and the present that he observes. Part of the past that Bennett recalls is his experience of childhood and the movement between the respectable, rural spa town of Harrogate and the industrial city of Leeds that was home to the Bennett family. Bennett recalls the prospective exclusivity of the hotel and its effect upon an ordinary, self-conscious, socially inhibited but aspirational northern family moving into such an environment. The potential disjuncture of this relocation of the domestic into the more formal and public setting of the hotel is confirmed by the title – *Dinner at Noon* – with its reference to the time of day when meals are expected to be eaten. Bennett compares his own remembered experience of being in a hotel with those of the guests around him, establishing a series of contrasts between public and private, past and

present. Observation is focused on the effect of the hotel forum on the behaviour of its guests.

At breakfast in the hotel restaurant, Bennett sits talking to camera: 'for years hotels and restaurants were for me theatres of humiliation, and the business of eating in public every bit as fraught with risk as taking one's clothes off'. The image that accompanies this speech is a closeup of an anonymous diner eating his English breakfast. The closeup reveals the slightly problematic transfer of food from the plate to the mouth of the diner via the knife and fork. The operation of manoeuvring egg and sausage on to the fork with the knife is synchronized with Bennett's reference to undressing in voiceover. As Bennett's sentence finishes with the word 'off', a small fragment of sausage accidentally falls off the diner's fork and back on to the plate. Bennett interrogates the transfer of the private domestic *habitus* that is manifest in the manner of eating food into the public setting of the hotel restaurant. Bennett observes and describes the protocols of public behaviour and, through the frame of the past, identifies the anxiety he felt from the experience of transferring private and domestic facets of behaviour into socially coded public spaces such as the hotel.

This fascination with the construction, presentation and performance of the self was the subject of Erving Goffman's work in which Bennett has registered an interest.¹⁹ Goffman argues that 'a status, a position, a social space is not a material thing to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct, coherent, embellished and well articulated'.²⁰ Bennett identifies the pattern of appropriate conduct for the reputable hotel and observes the ease with which this conduct is apparently performed. He suggests that his family could not readily and seamlessly assume the role of assured hotel diners, and recalls how his mother would smuggle her own supplementary food into public eating-places and dispense it under the table. Bennett looks for confirmation that a similar level of unease exists in the present-day hotel. The visual motif of isolating the fixtures and fittings of the restaurant such as crockery and cutlery through closeup, emphasizes that these apparently familiar objects, which we recognize and associate with domestic experience, are part of a wider public forum that is the hotel, and of that process of social denomination to which Goffman refers.

In *Dinner at Noon* Bennett is searching for the means of constructing a recognizably English mode of behaviour which is rooted in his own familial inheritance but recognizable in the present-day public. The observation continues in the hotel foyer where the vocabulary becomes clear. Bennett argues that he is interested in a finer delineation of people than conventional sociological ideas of class allow. In the hotel, he can observe with particularity: 'not class, which I don't like, but classes, types, which

19 Alan Bennett *Writing Home*
(London: Faber & Faber, 1994),
pp 30–31

20 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation
of Self in Everyday Life* (1959)
(London: Penguin 1990) p 81

I do'. Bennett is interested in the public appearance of difference that is manifest through contrasting behaviours, but he resists the need to explain it in terms of social division:

The foyers of American hotels are like station concourses or airport lounges. They're really part of the street ... here with the sofas and the fire we're still visibly related to the hall of the country house and people try to behave accordingly. For some, of course, this isn't too big a jump.

This general sequence suggests how the foyer of the hotel apparently welcomes some people and accommodates them as they are, as guests of the hotel. The hotel establishment strives to create an equivalent to the public home that will attract clients who are culturally and socially competent at being at home in public spaces. However, the general public is not quite as homogeneous or equal as the traditional and prestigious Crown Hotel requires. The guiding commentary of Bennett, allied with the presence of the camera and microphone, reveals the particular ways in which people are socially and publicly located through accent, dress, choice of reading, and so on (figures 1–4). This is confirmed when the camera isolates a hand holding a *Country Life* magazine. The sound of voices and subsequent shots reveal a well-to-do youngish couple discussing the difference in the value of property between Notting Hill and 'round here'. They are contrasted with an elderly couple who come from the same generation as Bennett's parents. This couple pore over the racing pages of a newspaper and discuss the selection of a horse on which to bet and the sweetness of their tea. They are smartly dressed and have an accent that connects them to the locality and to a lower-class echelon. But for Bennett, they are not simply working class or



Figs 1–4. *North and South*.
Dinner at Noon (BBC, tx 1988).

lower middle class. They are distinctive because they are idiosyncratic and connected with the locality and experience that Bennett remembers from childhood:

I've never been able to get worked up about class and its distinctions, I've never felt that the conventional three-tier account of social divisions has much to do with the case. What class are these? My mother would have called them a grand couple.

A cut to Bennett sitting in front of the hotel fire, addressing the camera directly, relieves the viewer from the incipient voyeurism of the visual and oral observation. He continues:

My mother's scheme of things admitted of much finer distinctions than are allowed by the sociologists. She'd talk about people being a better class, well-off, nicely spoken, refined, educated, genuine, ordinary, and the ultimate condemnation – common.

Bennett adopts his mother's *ordinary* Yorkshire idiom. The list of epithets is socially produced, but Bennett refuses a sociological analysis of the people in the hotel foyer. The words are more revealing of his mother's aspiration than of the antagonism suggested through the editing at the beginning of the sequence. Bennett's consciousness of class is less motivated by the structures of social inequality than by the difference that is manifest in public behaviour. Class difference and the relation of north to south represent shades of Englishness that Bennett's voice moves within and between. Daphne Turner argues that Bennett 'uses his experience of the North/South divide, including his experience of language, to examine the experience of being English, especially the English way of making a lot of Englishmen feel marginal'.²¹ Bennett's refusal of the language of sociological delineation for the ordinary, but closely observed, register of everyday speech functions as a disguise for the contradictions of his own position which are deflected by his adaptation of his mother's voice.

Bennett's chosen idiom eschews the social-realist tradition but can be linked to Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*.²² Both Bennett and Hoggart mourn the loss of the *authentic past* of northern England that is guaranteed by the figure of the scholarship boy's mother. The difference between them is not that Bennett has left his past but that he has formed a 'written voice' out of returning to it. He is able to combine a parody of this cultural specificity with his affectionate remembrance of it. It is a testament of affection in which social difference is noted and offset by mild humour. The transition is confirmed by Bennett, who comments: 'from this affection stems both the parody and the nostalgia; they are very close together'.²³ Bennett performs the role of an intermediary for the BBC, and the course he mediates is signalled through language. He recollects the language of his mother to describe in writing and performance the

²¹ Daphne Turner, *Alan Bennett in a Manner of Speaking* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997) p. 153.

²² Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958).

²³ Paul Taylor, 'Bennett and the betrayal of Englishness' *The Independent* 23 May 1994, p. 19.

observations and evaluations he makes of the present-day hotel occupants. Bennett's role does not readily yield a politics of class alignment but, as Turner points out, he is acutely aware of how the use of language can determine the conspicuously ideological affiliations of Englishness. In the foyer scene, Bennett makes a descriptive and informed observation and then offsets social difference through his adoption of his mother's voice. Bennett's written deployment of the language of the local and the everyday, via his mother, enables him to articulate a northern inheritance that is not only personal but to some degree recognizable and shared. The ability to identify local types and then situate them in a non-local frame of reference reflects the cultural acuity which Bennett has attained by moving away from his inheritance. The well-heeled competence in social performance on show in the present-day hotel is set against that which his parents regretted they had failed to attain:

my parents never went to, still less gave, a cocktail party. The education they regretted not having would have had cocktails on the syllabus and small talk, and the ability to converse, and the necessary accomplishment of saying things one doesn't mean 'Your Dad and me can't mix, we've not been educated'. They didn't see that what disqualified them was temperament, just as, though educated up to the hilt, it disqualifies me.

The act of recalling his parents' social unease leads Bennett to affirm an equivalence between his own perceived restraints and the insecurities felt by his parents that downplays the benefits of his own social mobility. Bennett is not as disqualified as he would like the audience to think he is, but his written voice is predicated upon the detailed recollection of the insecurities of qualification felt by his parents and passed on to the young boy of his remembered self. Goffman helps to analyze the underlying conflicts of self-presentation that are evident in *Dinner at Noon*. Goffman argues that 'the expressive coherence that is required in performances points out a crucial discrepancy between our all-too-human selves and our socialized selves'.²⁴ The human self is represented by the past of Bennett's childhood and his relationship with his parents; the socialized self is the present of the adult, educated writer. The dynamic between these selves confirms the discrepancy identified by Goffman. Bennett's impression-management aims to construct an equivalence between him and his parents, and to offset his status as a writer and public persona. However, he is able to detect little evidence of the same discrepancy within the hotel environment, for the guests are relatively relaxed and accomplished in their performances. Bennett's attachment to the terms of his inheritance is thus not confirmed by the present. The journey from his inheritance, through the classical route of the scholarship boy, is revealed by the

²⁴ Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, p. 63

attempt to return to and preserve the insecurities passed on from his parents whilst disguising his status as a writer and dramatist.²⁵ The significance of *Dinner at Noon* lies in the televised disclosure of this play of inheritance.

Portrait or Bust

In the opening of *Portrait or Bust*, Bennett is shown posing for the painter of his portrait before he turns to face the camera in closeup and says: 'he always says "be yourself", it's a baffling injunction, what they really mean is imitate yourself' This statement informs the underlying project of *Portrait or Bust*, which continues Bennett's concern with the performance of self-disclosure in public settings through the frame of a selectively remembered past. The public venue is the City Art Gallery in Leeds, which for Bennett, as his home city, is replete with childhood experience. This is also a setting where Bennett examines the meeting of his inherited provincial background of growing up in Leeds and the encounter with art in a public space. The documentary records the response of ordinary people to publicly exhibited art within the legitimate cultural sphere of the city art gallery. Bennett, with the television camera and microphone, lingers in the gallery, observing the public which includes a group of women pensioners who are being taken around the gallery by a guide. The situation enables the observation of individual responses to paintings and sculpture within the context of a group, however at one point a member of this group expresses her feeling of marginalization because she has not had an opportunity to express her view. The position of the camera and microphone just behind the group enables the viewer to see the painting and the heads and faces of the women. Bennett's carefully sympathetic tone of voice intervenes: 'Oh dear, still, I know exactly how she feels, wishing one had the gift of the gab'. This intervention is motivated by the recognition that the woman has brought attention upon herself involuntarily, despite believing that her opinion should be heard by the other members of the group. Even though Bennett clearly possesses this gift, his role is to mediate the relay between the observing camera and the public, and this mediation is founded on the relation between Bennett's private anxieties, which he alleges are still acutely felt, and the exposure of similar tensions in the public.

Portrait or Bust constructs an assumed equivalence between Bennett and the ordinary folk of Leeds. Goffman argues that 'when we ask whether a fostered impression is true or false we really mean to ask whether or not the performer is authorized to give the performance in question'.²⁶ The authority of Bennett as an institutionally sanctioned observer, commentator and writer rests upon the simultaneous eschewal of the cultural competencies and social

27 Walter Benjamin, 'The storyteller', in Hannah Arendt (ed. and trans.), *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, 1992), p. 107

28 Andrew Tolson, '"Being yourself": the pursuit of authentic celebrity', *Discourse Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4 (2001), pp. 443–57, p. 445

mobility that this role carries. Within the transient medium of television, Bennett carries those qualities of orality that Walter Benjamin described as the storyteller's *counsel* – for whom 'it is granted . . . to reach back to a whole lifetime'.²⁷ The viewer is frequently requested to accept not only the terms and sincerity of this documentary relation of observer to observed, but also the authenticity of Bennett's performance. Andrew Tolson argues that this aspect of projecting the self in public through the media 'must be understood as a type of public performance which, crucially, is not perceived as "acting" and if this is to be brought off successfully it needs to project an aura of authenticity'.²⁸ The authenticity and the carefully managed parameters of Bennett's performance are questionable because the viewer must accept an equivalence between his public self-presentation and the people he observes and describes.

In front of the painting with the title *Shadow of Death*, that depicts Mary's anticipation of the crucifixion, Bennett shifts the figurative meaning of the painting into his own experience (figures 5–7):

what always used to puzzle me as a child was that apart from the hair on his head Jesus never had a stitch of hair anywhere else. God seemed to have sent his only begotten son into the world without any hair under his arms. This rang a bell with me though because I was a late developer and at fifteen I was longing for puberty, and Jesus's pose here was exactly how I felt crucified on the wallbars during PE, displaying to my much more hirsute classmates my still unsullied armpits.

The cutting alternates between closeups of the painting and Bennett talking in front of the painting. Bennett's vivid anecdote has a



Figs 5–7. *Shadow of Death. Portrait or Bust* (Scorer for BBC, tx 1994).

stronger resonance through television than the painting with which it is associated. His ability to translate the terms of the painting into his childhood forms a contrast with the immediate and observed responses of the public. He draws upon the trope of the experience of PE to illustrate the inequalities of early adolescence. The distance between the isolated, sensitive schoolboy and a surrounding and overdetermined masculinity reveals an apparent nostalgic longing for, and attachment to, a felt isolation from the typifications of masculinity. Bennett forms his relation to the past here through a register that is gendered more than it is classed. After expressing an affinity with the woman struggling to express her point of view, the harsh experience of masculinity is invoked to register Bennett's difference from the sameness of the surrounding group. Bennett's recognition of his northern inheritance is voiced through an orientation towards the feminine.

The characteristics of the voice that Bennett generates from his inheritance signals the intermediate route both he and the television documentary steers between the legitimate culture of his background as a playwright/writer and ordinary lives. Turner suggests that this underlying duality is intimately connected to the subjectivity of Bennett's mother:

Life (lower case) is rooted in specific places in Leeds and in a spoken northern idiom, while the novels which his mother enjoyed suggested that making good invariably [took] the form of going Down South.²⁹

29 Turner, *Alan Bennett*, p. 149

Bennett has made this transition, but the particularity of his voice is predicated upon preserving his mother's point of view within his own observational writing about the people of Leeds. Bennett performs the role of the intermediary on behalf of the television audience and this occupation of a role gains a national dimension through the historical role of the BBC in articulating national culture. In this way Bennett's personal inheritance is positioned within the frame of national culture. The location that Bennett and the documentaries occupy can be conceptualized in the terms used by Pierre Bourdieu to describe French cultural taste

the new cultural intermediaries have invented a whole series of genres half-way between legitimate culture and mass production ('letters', 'essays', 'eye-witness accounts').³⁰

30 Pierre Bourdieu *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 325–6

The frame of reference assembled by Bourdieu in *Distinction* precludes broadcasting, and the middlebrow address of Bennett on behalf of the BBC cannot be completely understood by the antinomies of high/legitimate and low/mass culture. Bennett and other preceding intermediaries such as J.B. Priestley and John Betjeman, associated with both broadcasting and the authority of high culture, occupy and perform the role of institutionally appointed

observers. In this role they offer a mode of evaluative observation that becomes an assessment of the condition of the national culture through the frame of the past and a changing present.

Bennett expresses the hope that art will continue to 'rub off' on people as it did on him when a boy. At this point, he looks at the camera directly to launch his defence of a public cultural inheritance that is not simply a matter of prescribing the value of legitimate culture over mass culture, but of insisting upon the value of retaining free access to public culture against the ideology of Thatcherism:

This isn't a popular philosophy nowadays with all the government think tanks, all those fourteen-year-old eunuchs who staff the Adam Smith Institute believe that people are as single-minded and driven by material considerations as they are themselves, and if a means could be devised of doing a cost benefit analysis of art galleries then they would.

The school groups that are shown visiting the gallery illustrate this argument. They provide visual reference to the fact that Bennett's role in this process is dependent on the relations of equivalence that he tends to assume, through his childhood inheritance, with the current gallery visitors, including the woman discussed earlier. As a result, his rise to a position of relative privilege is disguised by fidelity to a northern past, and the viewer is requested to accept the terms of this disguise because Bennett's defence of his inheritance rests upon this. Bennett's direct and keenly observed northern voice, combined with that of his comparatively outspoken persona, enables him to occupy and perform his mediating role in public spaces for the BBC without simply reproducing the institutional paternalism which marks the history of the BBC. The middle-brow television documentary emerges out of the conjuncture of legitimate culture (the gallery), people of apparently low cultural capital (the retired women) and the personal voice of the intermediary. The local and provincial sites of *Dinner at Noon* and *Portrait or Bust* enable Bennett to return to, and identify, his inherited idiom. In the final documentary he ventures south, where he occupies a wider, national stage by entering *The Abbey*.

The Abbey

In this longer three-part documentary, Bennett describes the functions and furnishing of Westminster Abbey, its history as a part of the state apparatus as a burial centre for monarchs and figures of national significance, as a centre for national and international tourism, and as a place for religious worship. The first part of the documentary is given the title 'A Royal Peculiar', which refers to the fact that the abbey is under the jurisdiction of the crown and not

within any diocese. Bennett brings the particularity of his northern voice to bear on the grandeur of antiquity and reverence induced by a public space with all the significance of Westminster Abbey. This is demonstrated in the first part's opening shot of a soaring aerial view of Westminster Abbey, undercut by Bennett's opening line, which is anything but grandiose: 'it looks such a straightforward place from the outside, too much so for me really, a bit plain'. Bennett's deliberate use of epithets of ordinary language suggests a certain distance from, and irreverence towards, the official symbols of national culture. Bennett's narration of history combines irreverence in the face of grandeur with respect for religion and the monarchy. Approval for religious and cultural institutions is contrasted with a suspicion of the motives of state government and politics:

What happened to the monasteries after all was simply a process of privatization. Their land and assets sold off at a quick short-term profit. The beneficiaries largely those who are well-disposed to the regime and the monks – the employees – most of them made redundant. Well, more or less what happens today.

Bennett continues his defence of a national cultural inheritance from appropriation by the despoiling intervention of government under the guise of market forces. The wider context of Westminster Abbey reveals more of the political terms of Bennett's defence of public institutions. This is demonstrated when Bennett encounters the Coronation Chair:

While not quite stripped pine it suits our present-day fad for natural surfaces, but when it was first made around 1300 it was wholly gilded and painted . . . and must have looked as much fairground as Gothic, perhaps even a bit common. What has brought it down to its present state is time and a series of terrible indignities. A suffragette's bomb that exploded at the back of it . . . the Victorians varnished it so heavily that most of the original paintwork was destroyed. Generations of Westminster schoolboys have carved their names on it including one boy who slept in it in 1800 and left a message on the seat to say so.

Bennett's irreverence for the politics of national government never extends to a yearning for a republic, and is counterbalanced by sympathy for the monarchy. The historic moments of genuine national conflict are rendered as moments of mischief refracted through the errant perspective of a young boy. The images that accompany this personal commentary mix closeups with general shots from above that make Bennett look small and childlike as he clutches the mitred railings that fence off the chair. The closeups reveal the carvings that decorate the surface so that the chair, through these allusions to mischief, momentarily resembles a school desk rather than a national antiquity.

Bennett draws upon his remembered past to form connections with a wider public and national culture. However, *The Abbey* is notable for a direction of articulation that does not proceed from a Yorkshire location directly associated with childhood experience. The effect of being positioned in a nationally significant public space in the south of England serves to reveal the selected terms of Bennett's address. In his adult comments on artefacts of national culture in present-day London, he connects them with his childhood inheritance which, in this instance, is located in the distant north. The scholarship-boy experience that took Bennett from Leeds to Oxford University and then to be a writer and performer in London is implied rather than addressed directly. This is demonstrated by Bennett's reaction to the pupils of the abbey's attached public school at morning assembly. A keyhole frames the view of the assembly. Firstly, Bennett is seen peering through the hole and then the viewer is shown the view framed by the keyhole. The selection of the words from the sermon being read illustrates Bennett's political stance. The vicar states that 'it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God'. Bennett questions whether the value of remembered experience of childhood will endure with the current generation of youngsters, and observes:

When they're old will they remember these mornings in the abbey scanning the stalls for a particular face, will the hymns bring it back and the smell of cold stone and the voluntary?

He is content to form the answer to his query about remembering from his own judgement, as he mimics the socially-elevated voices of the young boys he observes. 'What was all that eye of the needle stuff, didn't apply to us did it Jones? No, and anyway we're clever.' This assessment of social privilege is refracted through Bennett's recall of his own childhood when Christian piety exercised a strong influence upon him. The religious ceremonies conducted in the abbey cause Bennett to appraise his current condition against his more devout childhood. As he watches Evensong he describes how his previously-held faith has not endured into adult life and he speaks of the regret of being unable to lay claim to a piety he does not feel. This impulse to look back longingly also admits a less conspicuous recognition of age. As David Lowenthal points out, nostalgia for the past is not necessarily a simple heritage nostalgia that returns to a preferable past, but one which involves a recognition of the distance created and the effect of the lapsed time since that past:

what we are nostalgic for is not the past as it was or even as we wish it were; but for the condition of *having been*, with a concomitant integration and completeness lacking in any present³¹

The difference between then and now is never reconciled. Those moments of the past that Bennett refers to are almost lost but the

³¹ David Lowenthal 'Nostalgia tells it like it was': in Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase (eds) *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1989), pp 18–32 p 19

³² Valerie Krips, *The Presence of the Past: Memory, Heritage, and Childhood in Postwar Britain* (London: Garland 2000) p. 36

³³ Stephen Heath, 'Childhood times', *Critical Quarterly* vol. 39 no. 3 (1997) pp. 16–27 p. 27

desire to revisit and recall described by Valerie Krips as 'the will to remember'³² continues to characterize his work.

Stephen Heath delineates the feeling that is articulated in *The Abbey*:

the end of childhood . . . seems always to turn on a requirement that the child *represent* something special (innocence, truth, the renewal of our selves of our past, the social security of some realm of simplicity, integrity . . . some authentic reality to which we can refer, in which we can find a certainty of value)³³

The authenticity, which Heath pinpoints and Bennett locates in the past, is confirmed by Bennett's observation of the presentation of the abbey. Outside the abbey, a uniformed commissioner speaking with a broad Cockney accent is shown promoting the celluloid version of an abbey tour. His repeated mantra is: 'a thousand years of kings and queens, a multi-picture show . . . part of our queen's coronation . . . takes twenty minutes costs one pound'. Bennett does not comment directly on this scene but he does later express his dislike of the 'cor blimey strike a light guv tourist board notion of England'. The following scenes imply a clear challenge to the authenticity that precedes them. The next scene returns to the interior of the abbey, where one of the Canons of the abbey describes to a tourist how his role as Chaplain to the speaker of Parliament is a function of the abbey that has not changed. A cut reveals the ongoing process of restoration of the outer surface of the abbey and the sound of the commissioner promoting the supertour reverberates from below. Bennett is moved to comment: 'so much of the abbey has been restored over the years that little of the original outer stonework remains. So while not a fake it's now a facsimile, a reproduction of itself.' The audience for this reproduction of this national past are international tourists who are shown, via a discreet camera, puzzling over maps, struggling with English, and listening attentively to the abbey guides. Bennett's relation to past experience is constructed as authentic, internalized, felt and expressed vocally in specific locations; this is contrasted with the embellished, artificial, consumed and externalized past of tourism that is registered through the image.

Bennett's reference to the facsimile and the supertour reveal a mistrust of the values that effect the exhibition of cultural antiquity. He states intransigently that:

inscribed over the portals of every English institution ought to be words of the seventeenth-century Viscount Falkland, 'if it's not necessary to change it's necessary not to change'.

Bennett argues for resisting the pressure of change, and in *The Abbey* he occupies a role that grants him a platform for commenting on the preservation and exhibition of an artefact of national heritage.

Bennett makes a public stand against the reifying tendencies of the commercialization of national heritage that occurred under Thatcherism. The combination of the Bennett persona, the BBC and the relay of television form a case for the preservation and protection of a different heritage that precedes Thatcherism. This tradition is anti-Thatcherite yet conservative, and looks back to the past to realize the value of preserving an institutionally embodied public heritage. Bennett, like Priestley, Betjeman and Hoggart, takes up an intermediate speaking position that is both part of, yet critical of, the establishment, and operates between legitimate and popular culture. These voices belong to a tradition of national popular discourse which, in the act of reporting and describing personal experience, simultaneously addresses – often through the relay of broadcasting – a collective register that becomes recognizable through an evaluation of past and present

Bennett's pattern of inheritances is located across the provincial (Harrogate), the municipal (Leeds) and national (Westminster Abbey). At each location, Bennett recollects and authenticates his past and looks for signs that particular aspects of his childhood inheritance can be observed in a changed present. In the face of increased social mobility, a market-oriented present, and the consequences of time passed, Bennett mounts a conservative defence of the inheritance he experienced. One of the effects of the restructuring of social relationships that Corner and Harvey highlight is the encroaching imperative of a privatized, commercialized and less authentic culture threatening a freely available, stable tradition of public service culture. It is this institutional articulation of a national popular inheritance that is confirmed by Bennett throughout his documentaries for the BBC.

The form of the television documentary offers the opportunity for Bennett to observe and comment on the featured locations through the frame of his recollected experience, which matches the intimate relay of television. The three documentaries and the figure of Alan Bennett suggest a different mode of articulating inheritance than that adopted in heritage cinema. Rather than exhibiting the aesthetic of period detail and sumptuous display achieved by the cinematic apparatus and mechanisms of visual identification, I would argue that nonfictional documentary television relays a pattern of inheritances, a pattern not based on period artefacts but formed from culturally located voices of experience that are not primarily visual but heard and felt. This less spectacular idea of heritage connects with John Caughie's suggested distinctions between Hollywood film and television drama. Caughie proposes that 'it is situation which holds the attention rather than the suspense of resolution, and it is recognition of characters in situations which forms the characteristic pleasure of television drama, rather than the fantasy of identification with ideal egos'.³⁴ The referentiality of television documentary forms

34 John Caughie, 'What do actors do when they act?', in Jonathan Bignell, Stephen Lacey and Madeleine MacMurrough-Kavanagh (eds), *British Television Drama: Past Present Future* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp 162–74, p 166

a relation to the past that also offers the viewer a similar possibility of the pleasure of *recognition*. Viewers can equally reject or recognize Alan Bennett's construction of the past with the same degree of critical vehemence that arose in response to the British heritage film. But perhaps by attending more to the cultural formation of heritage, film and television studies might begin to reveal a little more about just what is at stake in this debate.

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Girls on film: the musical matrices of film stardom in early British cinema

JON BURROWS

The standard narrative of the 'birth' of the film star gives the public much of the credit for instinctively and spontaneously inventing a new promotional concept. According to Eileen Bowser, a sudden 'ground swell of public interest in the movie actors began to appear in letters to the moving-picture studios and trade periodicals and in the daily conversations a good theatre manager had with his customers', demonstrating a 'strength of feeling' that was 'more than the manufacturers could have expected'.¹ But was there really nothing that came before that might have structured and moulded audiences' desires to know and see more about their favourite performers? Did studios have no clear precedents to inform and guide them? In other words, were there any pre-existing tropes of stardom that might enhance our understanding of the cultural specificity of early film stardom and the signifiatory processes through which a complex and substantial star system was constructed in a very short space of time?

This article will examine particular concepts of stardom common in the world of the West End stage which can be seen to provide intertextual reference points for the British film industry in the early 1910s, the historical moment in which the idea of the film star was emerging for the very first time and beginning to acquire a strong promotional valence. This essay argues that West End musical comedy played a key role in this process, with its methods of creating female star images providing a clear complementary model

1 Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema 1907-1915* (Berkeley and Los Angeles CA University of California Press 1994) p. 107

for a cinematic star system. The kinship between these two different forms of media stardom was so marked that British cinema came not only to depend upon this other cultural sphere, but also quickly began to supply metaphors of stardom which musical comedy used to reinforce and reinvigorate its own promotional practices. Having established this link, I suggest that a persistent air of controversy and disrepute that adhered to Edwardian musical comedy is partly responsible for British film producers' widespread reluctance to build their industry around a star system that they regarded for quite some time with manifest distaste. Musical comedy's influence on the British star system is therefore a significant factor in the origins and founding principles of film stardom in Britain, and illuminates aspects of its initial cultural reception.

Although this essay is most concerned with Britain's earliest experiences of a film star system, part of its hypothesis is likely to have some relevance to US cinema at this time. No scholarly accounts of the beginnings of the film star system in either country offer much explanation of pre-existing modes of media stardom upon which the film industry might have drawn and which might have influenced how the cinematic star system came to emerge as it did between 1910 and 1914. Most of the literature on the origins of stardom acknowledges that there is some kind of theatrical inheritance involved.² After all, many theatrical performers in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century gained a degree of fame and fortune unknown to their predecessors. They attracted a similarly unprecedented degree of public interest in their habits and opinions – all of which was reflected in new methods of financing and promoting theatrical productions around 'star' names.³

However, few scholars identify anything more than a vague connection between cinematic and theatrical modes of stardom. Richard deCordova's groundbreaking account of the beginnings of the star system in US cinema asserts that in the 1910s there is a clear dividing line and fundamental conceptual difference between the idea of a theatre star and a film star. This is evident in factors relating to gender, age and experience. Female stage stars in the upper echelons of the acting profession were in a distinct minority, and those that did attain the status of top billing had generally reached their middle years by the time they got there. DeCordova thus argues that this represents a marked contrast with the first wave of female 'picture personalities', who not only outnumbered the men but often came to fame whilst still in their teens: 'the cinema, once it began to develop and promote its own stars, was much more intent on basing it on a cult of youth than the theatre had been'.⁴ This was certainly not true, though, of certain forms of popular musical entertainment common on the late-Victorian and Edwardian stage on both sides of the Atlantic. Linda Mizejewski has recently charted the ways in which the teenage chorus girls in Florenz Ziegfeld's musical

2 See, for example, Richard Dyer *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1979), p. 102; Janet Staiger *Seeing stars: Velvet Light Trap* no. 20 (1983) reprinted in Christine Gledhill (ed.) *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London: Routledge, 1991) pp. 8–9.

3 Tracy C. Davis's monumental recent work on the economic structure of the theatrical industry in the nineteenth century insistently reiterates that throughout this era 'hits depend[ed] on the involvement of star performers' and makes it clear that the theatrical touring system in the UK was an entirely star-driven enterprise. See Tracy C. Davis *The Economics of the British Stage 1800–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 335–352.

4 Richard deCordova *Picture Personalities: the Emergence of the Star System in America* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990) p. 52.

revues on Broadway became iconic star performers at the turn of the century, and the scale of this phenomenon leads her to observe 'how much cinematic practices of star promotion are indebted to earlier theater practices'⁵ I am most concerned here, though, with the original British prototype of this kind of musical theatre – West End musical comedy.

The generic specificity of the term 'musical comedy' has progressively become somewhat blurred and requires precise definition. In the 1920s and 1930s 'musical comedy' came to signify much the same thing that the word 'musical' stands for today; it functioned as a broad category covering all forms of popular entertainment in which the cast performed songs.⁶ But between the mid 1890s and the beginning of World War I, musical comedy was a new development with a more narrowly defined genre format. It enjoyed a remarkable commercial vogue, whilst making a unique and much discussed cultural impact upon the *fin de siècle* generation. Its modish appeal lay partly in the (then) novel spectacle of combining drama with modern song, but its hold on the popular imagination had deeper sociological roots. Musical comedy in its first incarnation was chiefly famous for the unprecedented visual, narrative and promotional prominence it gave to its attractive young female chorus lines, and also because of the unusually confident and adventurous heroines who drove its plots.

Just as the film industry would shortly nominate teenage girls as many of its first stars, so musical comedy before it had fetishized female youth to an extraordinary degree. What Peter Bailey has described as musical comedy's 'exaltation of the woman as girl' was signposted most conspicuously by a prolific cycle of productions – mainly staged at George Edwardes' Gaiety Theatre – with the word 'Girl' in the title, including for example, *A Gaiety Girl* (1894), *The Shop Girl* (1894), *The Girl from Kays* (1902), *The Girl Behind the Counter* (1906), *Our Miss Gibbs, or, The Girl at the Stores* (1909), *The 'Sunshine' Girl* (1912).⁷ As these titles suggest, musical comedy frequently cast its leading ladies as young working women. Occasionally, as with the first example, the plays offered self-reflexive representations of the workaday world of the chorus line girls who were synonymous with the genre. As the other titles indicate, they also commonly took as their settings the female-dominated work spaces of expanding service industries such as telegraph offices, teashops, soap factories and, most typically, department stores. In other words, musical comedy – particularly of the Gaiety Theatre variety – was often defined by the way in which it spun narrative fantasies around the New Woman who had become conspicuous in the public sphere as both worker and/or consumer. And, according to Bailey, many of its greatest fans were drawn from this same class of mobile women.⁸

Since musical comedy celebrated a new female prominence in the

5 Linda Mizejewski *Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema* (Durham NC: Duke University Press 1999) p. 43

6 See Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson *Musical Comedy: a Story in Pictures* (New York NY: Taplinger 1970) p. 33

7 Peter Bailey, "'Naughty but nice": musical comedy and the rhetoric of the girl 1892–1914' in Michael R. Booth and Joel H. Kaplan (eds) *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996) p. 38

8 *Ibid.* p. 40

workplace and a concomitant new economic purchasing power that brought glamorous consumer luxuries within reach, Erika D. Rappaport has categorized it as the first truly representative mass art form of the modern consumer age in Britain. She argues that it should be interpreted as an influential publicity adjunct of the first-generation department stores. Not only did department store proprietors sometimes finance musical comedies as a marketing ploy, but Rappaport suggests that on a more abstract level 'they were partners dedicated to igniting insatiable consumer appetites', by virtue of the fact that the genre 'translated consumption into visual pleasure and spectacle'.⁹

The display of desirable goods was, as this suggests, an integral element in the *mise-en-scène* of musical comedy. The plays acted in particular as influential shop windows for the fashion industry. The theatrical fan magazine *Play Pictorial* ran regular columns focusing exclusively on all the salient coutural features of the latest musical comedy productions.¹⁰ Furthermore, productions which had a long run would often take the extreme step of throwing out costumes in order to stay in touch with the new season's fashions. When, for example, *The Arcadians* (1910) reached its 550th performance at the Shaftesbury Theatre, it was deemed necessary to completely redress the cast in outfits that offered 'a foretaste of the fashions of tomorrow'. Such attractions seem to have been clearly designed to appeal to female audiences and to stimulate female spending, with press announcements promising that 'the fair sex will revel in the feast of beautiful and wonderful Parisian costumes, including the startling bifurcated skirt, the bewildering array of hats – turbans, beehives &c – on exhibition in the Askwood and Arcadia Restaurant scenes'.¹¹

Musical comedy also had its own distinctive system of star promotion through which its 'leading female players were the subject of heavy media attention'.¹² Links to various luxury consumer markets were thus reinforced by the use of female star images to endorse a range of fashion, cosmetic and confectionery products. In addition, innumerable newspaper and magazine interviews reported on the opinions, tastes and current relationships of leading musical comedy actresses. This practice began as early as 1894 with the publication of a number of unusually personal 'chats' with, and marital updates on, the very first Gaiety Girls, Ada Reeve and Cissy Loftus.¹³

The parallels between these developments and the early discourses around stardom in the film industry are obvious. DeCordova has documented a complicity between the first fully elaborated film star images and basic consumerist ideals which is directly analogous to musical comedy's links with the world of commerce: 'The star was worshipped as a creature completely free to express him or herself by pursuing the pleasures afforded by the emergent consumer

9 Erika D. Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 184.

10 See for example: 'Fashions behind the footlights at the Gaiety Theatre', *Play Pictorial*, vol. 13 no. 80 (1909), pp. 126–7; 'Frocks and frills', *Play Pictorial*, vol. 24 no. 146 (1914), pp. 98–9.

11 *The Era*, 5 November 1910, p. 13. Such trends were contemporaneously matched on Broadway. Mizejewski notes how impresarios like Ziegfeld made co-promotional deals with fashion designers and similarly constructed narrative scenarios which connected the performers' roles with the world of modern consumer culture. The Ziegfeld stage-as-department-store, with chorus girls graduated into mannequins, is perhaps the apotheosis of modern entertainment as consumerism', Mizejewski, *Ziegfeld Girl*, p. 91.

12 Bailey, 'Naughty but nice', p. 52.

13 See for example: 'A chat with Miss Ada Reeve', *The Sketch*, 8 August 1894, p. 80; 'Miss Cissy Loftus's marriage', *The Sketch*, 5 September 1894, p. 287.

culture' ¹⁴ And, just as with musical comedy, it was young female players who most conspicuously demonstrated this synergy by lending their signatures to specific product promotions: 'stars began to appear in advertising in the teens, even more explicitly promoting the joys of consumption. Female stars appeared, for instance, endorsing beauty products.'¹⁵ What is more, the intense media focus on the 'real' personalities and private lives of musical comedy actresses clearly prefigures the film industry's subsequent elaborate attempts to foster a sense of intimate familiarity with its players

It is also possible to identify on a basic empirical level several direct signs of the influence which musical comedy exerted on the promotion of various British film actresses in the 1910s. One key area is recruitment. British producers poached many of their leading players from musical comedy chorus lines. When it came to forging a star system, the British studio that was most committed, energetic and resourceful was the Hepworth Manufacturing Company. Its success in breeding stars is reflected by the fact that of the top twenty favourite British film artistes voted for by readers in a fan magazine popularity poll in 1915, eight were principally associated with Hepworth.¹⁶ At least the same number of actors and actresses in Hepworth's stock company were plucked from musical comedy theatre: Gladys Sylvani, Flora Morris, Claire Pridelle, Madge Campbell, Violet Hopson, Alec Worcester, Jack Hulcup and Harry Buss.¹⁷ The same background was shared by a number of actors and actresses hired by other companies, including Neptune's Joan Ritz, British and Colonial's Marie Pickering and Barker's Daphne Glennie.¹⁸ The author of a contemporary 'How To' guide to film acting for aspirant film stars even went so far as to suggest that the cinema and musical comedy chorus lines both offered the same kind of meritocratic career openings for pretty but inexperienced candidates.¹⁹

The rhetoric of musical comedy's fetishization of female youth was also commonly used in the pen portraits of film actresses supplied in publicity items. Former Gaiety Girl Chrissie Bell was tagged as the 'Mind the Camera Girl' when she began appearing on screen in 1913. Dolly Tree was simply branded 'The Cinema Girl'.²⁰ The fan magazine *Pictures and the Picturegoer* ran a regular series of interviews with leading female players in a column called 'The Girl on the Film'.²¹ In addition, occasional film projects were based on musical comedies. A 1914 plan to film a series of recent musical comedy successes and then screen them with a synchronized gramophone accompaniment foundered on the daunting technological logistics.²² However, *A Gaiety Duet* (Gaumont, UK, 1909), a compendium of filmed extracts from the musical comedy *Our Miss Gibbs*, drew attention away from the incompatibilities between the two media by offering instead 'a most interesting glimpse behind the scenes' of the infamous Gaiety Theatre dressing rooms.²³

Relatively few British films in this era could be said to match musical comedy's fascination with modern feminine-gendered workplaces, but the core narratives of discovery and success privileged in film star discourse clearly owe a major debt to plays like *Our Miss Gibbs* and *The Girl Behind the Counter*. Numerous 'behind the scenes' tales about the lives of fictional film stars promulgated in fan magazine short stories and novels often duplicate typical musical comedy plots. One such novel, *The Cinema Star* (1917), offers a representative example of this with its tale of Vera Vane, an Oxford Street department store 'shopgirl', who is spotted by the Marvelograph Film Company and becomes a major international film star.²⁴

It is perhaps just as significant that the synergistic relationship between musical comedy and the early film star system was very much a two-way affair. Just as the cinema borrowed personnel and marketing ideas from this brand of theatrical entertainment, at least two musical comedies produced in this period specifically celebrated the phenomenon of film stardom and found it an apt source of suitable plot material. The first of these plays was a Gaiety production staged in April 1913 and titled, predictably enough, *The Girl on the Film*. The action is centred upon the employees of Vioscope, a small film studio, and in typical musical comedy tradition it is driven by a number of cross-class relationships: a Vioscope scenario typist is wooed by a City financier whilst an aristocratic debutante temporarily cross-dresses to work alongside a film actor who is regarded by her family as her social inferior. Additionally, in what seems intended as a tribute to the cinema's consolidation of the standard musical comedy image of women as

²⁴ Clive Holland, *The Cinema Star* (London: Grafton, 1917)

The Vioscope Studio set in *The Girl on the Film*, taken from *The Play Pictorial* vol. XXII, no. 131, p. 26.



The Vioscope Studio typists' song from *The Girl on the Film*, taken from *The Play Pictorial* vol. XXII, no. 131, p. 24.



Typists' Chorus by MICHAEL SORAN. Hammer Sq., W. 14

workers in the public sphere, the proprietor of the Vioscope studio is a motorcycling suffragette.

The most striking affinity between the two media demonstrated in this play is however evident in its awareness of the libidinal nature of the processes of display and spectatorship which underpinned the promotion of both musical comedy 'Girls' and film actresses. Several of the songs offer reflections upon the transgression of public and private boundaries inherent in the notion of film stardom. The lyrics sung by a chorus of 'cinema girls' lounging around on a location shoot provide a good example of this:

Oh, isn't the cinema splendid?
The jolliest game that we know,
When we come down away from town
To play in a picture show!
And then, when the acting is ended,
We sit on the grass at our tea,
And laugh and lark until it's dark,
And life is just a spree! . . .
Then we can frolic and laugh;
There will be scenes that would be worth a lot of money
If you put them on the cinematograph!²⁵

²⁵ These lyrics were published in a short songbook, Adrian Ross, *The Girl on the Film* (London: Chappell & Co., 1913), p. 19.

There is a clear sexual innuendo in the last three lines of the song, a typical feature of the persistent erotic subtext in the star image of the musical comedy girl. Peter Bailey has argued that the centrality of glamour and public display to the archetypal musical comedy girl's star persona helped to foster a spectatorial voyeurism and prurience which the plays themselves deliberately indulged and tantalized with. Rather than explicitly depicting the girls as straightforwardly vampish or promiscuous, the construction of their active sexuality was calculatedly ambiguous. These were not bad girls, they were simply – in the contemporary argot – 'naughty', the force of their desires was sublimated into playful hints and a strict level of discretion was maintained.²⁶ This interpretation is supported by Sally Mitchell's suggestion in her study of Victorian and Edwardian 'girl's culture' that 'The creeping sexualisation of girlhood began in the years before the war, with . . . girls who were interested in looks and fashions, boy-conscious, flirtatious, teasing – but cute, rather than fast'.²⁷ The question of what the saucy revelatory 'scenes' might be in the song from *The Girl on the Film* is thus counterbalanced and concealed by a smokescreen language of semi-innocent 'frolics', 'sprees' and 'larks'

Even though this suggestiveness is a standard feature of musical comedy, the lyricist's conceit also represents in this instance an extraordinarily acute comment on the cinematic star phenomenon, and in its perceptiveness offers further evidence that these two star systems had more than a few recurrent topoi in common. The lyrics articulate how an important part of the film spectator's interest is directed towards the star's activities beyond the range of the camera (earlier in the play a secretary reads out a piece of fan mail sent to a Vioscope star: 'I won't ask you for your photograph – I've seen that hundreds of times on the films – it's you yourself I want to see')²⁸ This is not so different from the concept of the polysemic star text identified by Richard Dyer.²⁹ The sexual dimension which the song imparts to this thirst for extra-diegetic intimacy is not, however, just a function of musical comedy's standard repertoire of titillatory pleasures. It also cogently underscores the fact that film fans' obsessive attempts at straining beyond the limits of regulated knowledge about stars to penetrate the realm of the private and authentic would most likely be fuelled by a pronounced sexual curiosity. As deCordova convincingly argues, 'the star system, and arguably twentieth-century culture in general, depends on an interpretative schema that equates sexuality with the private and furthermore accords the sexual the status of the most private, and thus the most truthful, locus of identity'.³⁰

The other musical comedy to be set in the film world was *The Cinema Star*, staged at the Shaftesbury Theatre in 1914. It similarly revels in the affinities between the two media and specifically dwells upon the cinema's propensity for 'revealing' the private and the

26 Bailey 'Naughty but nice', pp. 45–6

27 Sally Mitchell *The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England 1880–1915* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995) pp. 182–3

28 'The girl on the film' MS (04/04/1913), London, British Library, Lord Chamberlain's Play Collection, p. 6

29 See Dyer *Stars* pp. 68–98, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: British Film Institute, 1986) pp. 2–3

30 DeCordova, *Picture Personalities* p. 140

forbidden and for trading in voyeurism. The plot concerns a moralistic millionaire who agitates for the suppression of film shows, but who is himself turned into a reluctant film star and 'shown up' when the film actress of the play's title contrives for him to be secretly filmed with her in a compromising position. There is a neat in-joke concerning one of the characters which consciously celebrates the close family ties between the star systems of musical comedy and the cinema: one of the principal film actresses in the piece reveals in a song that she is actually a former musical comedy chorus girl. As with *The Girl on the Film*, the lyrics to many of the songs focus upon the transgression of the boundaries between the public and the private lives of women which stardom produces. The eponymous heroine, for example, sings of how

I'm all by starts and nothing long;
And luckily my nerves are strong,
For when I sleep, or when I waken,
A picture-film of me is taken
And every time I sigh or laugh
It means another photograph!
For sad or merry, well or ill,
The camera pursues me still,
'Till every single thing I do
Is thus exposed to public view!
(I'm known to all society
On films of great variety,
For I appear on ev'ry screen,
The famous Picture Palace Queen!)³¹

31 'The cinema star', MS
(03/06/1914) London: British
Library: Lord Chamberlain's Play
Collection, p. 48

For a fledgling medium desperate to establish its aesthetic and social respectability, these facets of female stardom however represented tricky ground to navigate. As Tracy C. Davis has shown, non-musical legitimate drama had for many years prior to this very carefully sought to negotiate the moral dilemma involved in exhibiting female performers to an uncommonly public view. This necessitated avoiding a star system based on personal appeal and enforcing a rigid distinction between 'the private and theatrical halves of an actress'. Respectable actresses hid behind the fictional characters they represented rather than presenting themselves as star attractions.³² Robert C. Allen concurs that an emphasis upon stressing an actress's ability to disguise and transform herself, and thus minimize personal exposure, diffused a major source of stigma for female players and removed the possibility of social impropriety and salacious spectacle: 'the less "herself" an actress was as a woman in the role she played, the less threatening was her presence on the stage'.³³

32 Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 105–6

33 Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p. 50

These historical lessons were not lost on British film producers in the 1910s. Fears about the degree of exposure which women on

screen received and the potential prurient and desiring looks they might arouse provoked a wariness within certain influential quarters of British film culture about what a star system entailed and what its social and moral consequences might be. Many commentators showed considerable chauvinistic resistance to the new mobile woman of means, glamour and sexual fascination idealized in musical comedies and in film company publicity. Colin N. Bennett, the resident technical expert on the *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, voiced a not uncommon view when he replied to a letter from Miss E.C., a correspondent asking for advice about how she might become a film star:

Sometimes young men write asking how to make a start in the kinema world, and then, often as not, we give them at least half-hearted encouragement to go on. This is because men are, or should be, experimentalists. It is for them to go ahead, take chances, and so help on the process of evolution at all costs, even if it means them getting a good kicking for their pains. With women the matter is different . . . no one should fail to warn them of the trying time almost certainly in store. . . If Miss E.C. is determined not to spare herself unpleasantness, she may make personal calls. But the business of touting one's good looks on the chance of catching a manager's eye is to some people a rather hateful one.³⁴

Often such self-appointed moral guardians within the film industry directly confirmed the influence of the musical comedy girl as a template for modern forms of media stardom by invoking her in a negative sense. Thus musical comedy was singled out for admonishment as a cautionary example of a pernicious trend that should be avoided in the future development of the business. Trade paper editorials defended the cinema against the attacks of social legislators and reformers precisely by distinguishing it from musical comedy. *The Cinema* argued in 1913 that

there are few films based on as great piffle as is to be found in many of the so-called musical comedies, which rely for their drawing power upon the stringing together of a few catchy tunes and oftentimes a too bountiful display of the nether extremities.³⁵

The same journal boasted a few months later that 'although the Britisher may flirt with the sirens of musical comedy' he would in time revert to a more time-honoured 'love for drama of the intense order' – the kind of original and ersatz Victorian melodramas being adapted in spades by British producers throughout this decade.³⁶ The *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* wholeheartedly agreed with this prognosis: 'the truth is that people long since tired of the inane musical play, and that is one reason why they welcomed the wholesome and humanising influence of the silent drama'.³⁷

³⁴ *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, 20 May 1915, p. 51.

³⁵ *The Cinema*, 11 June 1913, p. 21.

³⁶ *The Cinema*, 13 November 1913, p. 73. Erika Rappaport points out that several new melodramas staged at the Lyceum Theatre in the 1910s like William Melville's *The Shop-Soiled Girl* deliberately set out to show shop girls modelled on Gaiety Theatre heroines being punished for their pragmatic morals with social ruin in order to reassert the kind of stark dichotomy between virtue and vice (which) is absent from musical comedy. Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, p. 202. It is also worth noting that *The Shop-Soiled Girl* was concurrently adapted for the cinema by British Empire Films in 1915.

³⁷ *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, 9 April 1914, p. 56.

This campaign to distance the industry from any association with musical comedy frequently smacked of rank hypocrisy. As noted earlier, the Hepworth Manufacturing Company recruited a great many of its players from musical comedy chorus lines. The very public, visible presence of Hepworth's young female stars on cinema screens, multifarious popular magazines and even underground station posters understandably led one journalist to suggest that they were every bit 'as ubiquitous as Gaiety Girls'³⁸ But between 1912 and 1914 Hepworth issued a flurry of defensive press releases specifically declaring its stars to be 'totally unspoilt by the training of musical comedy' and untainted by its 'cramping and distorting influence'³⁹

The reason for this ambivalent relationship with musical comedy's promotion of female youth was the perceived need to foster the image of 'wholesomeness' invoked by one of the trade editorials quoted above. This era witnessed a profusion of bewildering and controversial new modes of female labour, behaviour and sexual morality, and the cinema, which literally magnified the conspicuous visual display of women in public, was regularly implicated in these social changes. Just as the musical comedy celebrated the rise of the young working woman in public life, the perceived opportunities for film stardom were advertised in similar terms 'Woman's chances of making a living have been increased by the rise of the biograph machines', declared one article, whilst opportunist new 'academies' of film acting which emerged in Britain, like the Victoria Cinema College, proclaimed in their publicity that film stardom was 'the New Profession for Ladies'⁴⁰ Faced with a vulnerability to attack on this issue, there was at this historical juncture very little faith or enthusiasm within the British film industry for a star system based on girlish confidence, sartorial extravagance and youthful good looks.⁴¹ The evidence of this equivocation is abundant in the contemporary trade press. An unsigned article in *The Cinema* in 1913 claimed that 'the public at large cares less for physical beauty than for acting ability', and would soon grow tired of actresses for whom 'prettiness of face and figure [was] the principal, if not the only, asset' The author invoked the example of a very different kind of figure from the legitimate stage for film producers to bear in mind: *grande dame* performers like Irene and Violet Vanbrugh or Lena Ashwell 'Not all the leading actresses of the time (we are referring to the ordinary stage) are pretty in the academic meaning of the term', he points out 'Indeed, some of them are very plain persons indeed'⁴²

West End musical comedy constituted the obvious model for a new kind of female stardom, and some film producers and publicists clearly did use it as their template. Musical comedy offered a precedent for creating a new form of celebrity that was consonant with the ideals of an emerging consumer society, it provided key promotional concepts and taglines for production companies and it

³⁸ *The Bioscope*, 26 December 1912 p. 963

³⁹ *Picture Theatre News*, 10 January 1912 p. 8. See also *Woman's Life*, 6 April 1912, p. 282, *Pictures and the Picturegoer*, 31 January 1914, p. 533. *The Film Censor*, 30 December 1914 p. 3

⁴⁰ From respectively, *The Bioscope* 6 January 1910 p. 33 and *Pictures and the Picturegoer* 10 April 1915, p. 35

⁴¹ For an analysis of the way in which Hepworth tried to circumvent these difficulties by creating a popular star profile and persona for his ingenue leading lady Alma Taylor which actively resisted most of the core elements of contemporary star discourse, see Jon Burrows 'Our English Mary Pickford' Alma Taylor and ambivalent British stardom in the 1910s in Bruce Babington (ed.) *British Stars and Stardom From Alma Taylor to Sean Connery* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2001) pp. 29–41

⁴² *The Cinema* 30 July 1913 p. 3

even supplied some of the actual actors and actresses who formed part of the first wave of British film stars. The infamously flighty nature of the British musical comedy girl also, however, helps us to understand exactly why most producers and publicists in this country persistently got cold feet when it came to managing a star system until well after the end of World War I. As late as 1918, 'Observer' in *The Bioscope* was still confidently predicting the imminent demise of the current hierarchy of film stars:

The time is near when the public will not designate as star any actor or actress who is not finished in histrionic art. Because motion pictures are comparatively new with the people of this country they have come to regard the player frequently as an old acquaintance. In the absence of a large number of truly capable players these actors and actresses of mediocre abilities have gone on appearing in picture after picture until they have acquired a certain vogue, which they and producers and others also mistook for stardom.⁴³

⁴³ *The Bioscope*, 31 January 1918
p. 29

Anticipating later historiographical writings, the public is here ascribed the principal role in creating the first generation of film stars. But it should now be clear that what 'Observer' sees as their 'mistakes' in preferring the constant exposure of vernal good looks to the more selective appearances of experienced and fully matured performers were very much the product of a conditioning they would have previously received at the hands of musical comedy impresarios. We should not be misled by the fact that early star discourse often makes quite militant distinctions between the working practices of performers employed within the film industry and those from the theatre. Even though many young film actresses spoke at length in interviews about the radical material differences of working in open air locations and undertaking daredevil stunts compared with a life on the stage,⁴⁴ and no matter that they were never heard to sing or dance on screen, Britain's first significant film stars – actresses including Alma Taylor, Violet Hopson, Eve Balfour and Elisabeth Risdon – should be seen as intermedial descendants of the Edwardian Gaiety Girls.

⁴⁴ See for example *Pictures and the Picturegoer* 8 November 1913, p. 131

British Universities Film & Video Council: a twenty-year report

MURRAY WESTON

The British Universities Film Council was formed in 1948 – fifty-five years ago. Strange therefore to reflect that the BUFVC (the ‘and Video’ was added in 1982) has been operating for more than half of the history of commercial moving pictures. This longevity may be no real test of virtue, but it does say something about the Council’s ability to adapt, and to cope with the rapid changes that have taken place in the production, storage and delivery of moving pictures during the period. Despite the passage of time, we still inhabit a world in which scholarship has yet fully to appreciate and engage with moving pictures and sound as a primary source, so the Council may, even now, be regarded as part of an avant garde.

Readers of *Screen* may well know that in 1982–83 there was a major reorganization at the British Film Institute, by which the BUFVC had been housed and supported since its incorporation. That reorganization, and reinterpretation of policies, saw various satellite bodies of the BFI, such as the BUFVC and the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT), ‘tailed off’ or cut adrift. The changes at the BFI signalled the Council’s move to independence and, at the same time, brought about the demise of SEFT – the founder of *Screen*.

At the time of our move from the BFI, its declared focus was the promotion of film and television as ‘art and culture’. The BUFVC’s interests, which focused more on content than form, were thought not to be an asset to the Institute. We were perceived as disconnected

from the culture of 'cinema', although the support of film studies has always been important to us. What we did extol, and always will, is the value of moving images and their interpretation in learning across all subject disciplines. Those of us who had set great store by a strong relationship with the BFI thought the change was painful and unwarranted. Paradoxically, the forced independence proved beneficial for the BUFVC and, in the process, the BFI lost an asset which resonates with the aims of its more recent policy changes.

Twenty years on, it is a good moment to chart some of the developments the BUFVC has undertaken during the period and to point to where its work may go in the future.

The BUFVC is distinctive in that it 'promotes the production, study and use of film and related media for higher/further education and research'. During the last three years, in response to new funding policies,¹ we have started to engage properly with the needs of post-sixteen education. More than fifty-five years of focused activity has enabled the BUFVC to accumulate a wealth of specialist assets, experience and knowledge. This unique knowledge base has put the Council in a good position to gauge and respond to demand from the teaching and research communities and to offer new services in a rapidly changing environment. The ability to innovate and remain capable of adapting to change is essential; it is key to the way in which our work has evolved.

During the last two decades we have moved faster and further towards delivery of new services online. However, we firmly believe in 'hybrid' media, and many products are despatched in print, videocassette, CD and other physical media.

At its heart, the BUFVC is a facilitator – gathering, filtering, evaluating and repackaging information and content for onward dissemination to users. These users have traditionally been the staff of educational establishments – teachers, researchers, librarians and other service providers. Now that there is more direct access by students online, this development can only increase. The BUFVC augments the activities of the institutions it serves and provides some of the specialist tools and resources that may be needed in the process of learning and teaching. We aim to offer services nationally which would be unlikely to be developed locally.

BUFVC's key activities fall into five areas:

- publishing (books, magazine, CDs, videocassettes)
- courses, conferences and events
- information, research and dissemination
- post-transmission access to UK broadcasts
- delivery of moving image content online

While the BUFVC is a membership organization, all of its services currently delivered online are offered free at the point of access in

¹ The BUFVC receives core grant funding from the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) of the Higher Education Funding Councils via the Open University. This is derived from a direct funding PES line transferred by the government to the Higher Education Funding Councils and administered by JISC.

the ac.uk domain. Therefore all staff and students in UK higher and further education may use BUFVC resources. However, physical publications – video copies of television programmes, copies of our magazine *Viewfinder* and occasional books – are delivered only to subscribers/purchasers

Some of our more recent service developments are described below

Off-Air Recording Back-Up Service

When the *Copyright Designs and Patents Act* was passed in 1988, the new legislation installed a pragmatic UK exception to copyright and a licensing arrangement which allowed educational establishments to record, copy and keep tapes of broadcasts and cable programmes for use in teaching and research. Following the implementation of the law in 1990, the BUFVC obtained a special letter of agreement which allowed it to provide a back-up service to its member institutions, in case they missed the opportunity to record anything locally. Now, more than a decade on, the BUFVC records television programmes from BBC1, BBC2, BBC3, BBC4, ITV1, Channel Four and 5. We retain some 44,000 hours per year of British television using a digital tape recording system. Storage is managed in collaboration with the Bournemouth University Library. The collection extends back to 1 June 1998, and we have an arrangement for copies of earlier transmissions back to 1990 to be obtained via the National Film and Television Archive. To accommodate Welsh-language programme requests, we have an arrangement with the National Library of Wales.

In March 2003, the BUFVC will install an innovative computer disk-based system which will allow the recording and delivery of video copies of broadcasts in encoded form – capable of being delivered from CD or locally online from servers in licensed institutions. The reuse of previously broadcast material in learning, teaching and research is now very important in the UK. New EU legislation, due to be implemented in 2003, may affect the way this content can be delivered to students and researchers.

Television and Radio Index for Learning and Teaching (TRILT)

The TRILT is a brand new online database and alert service which complements the off-air recording work we do. It employs commercially available television and radio listings data to create an archive of information on programmes transmitted. It provides online access to some 1.3 million records ingested annually, describing

broadcasts receivable in the UK via terrestrial, satellite and cable services. It also offers data ten days in advance of transmission, plus a customizable alert service which will automatically e-mail the user when a programme on a topic in which they are interested is due to be transmitted. The TRILT data is continuously improved and enhanced from the learning and teaching perspective, with links, reviews, improved descriptions and references to related resources. TRILT indicates where the BUFVC holds a copy of a programme in its Off-Air Recording Back-Up Service. The data currently extends back to July 2001, with additional data from selected terrestrial television programmes going back to 1995. The BUFVC is planning to 'back fill' the TRILT with more archive listings data as it becomes available to us. To access the TRILT go to www.bufvc.ac.uk/trilt

Moving Image Gateway (MIG)

The internet offers a vast array of sources of information and content relating to film, television and radio. Some of these sources are trivial, inaccurate and, occasionally, illegal. On the other hand, there are also some excellent resources which are useful for study, teaching and research. The BUFVC has therefore established the Moving Image Gateway to point our constituency to sites which we have reviewed, classified and described. There are now some 700 sites listed in the MIG, and every month we check the links and list four 'sites of the month' to draw new content to the attention of our users. Visit the MIG at www.bufvc.ac.uk/gateway

British Universities Newsreel Database (BUND)

The BUFVC's work in assembling high-quality metadata describing British cinema newsreel content has a lengthy track record. Built on the foundation of the Slade Film History Register, initiated by Thorold Dickinson at University College London in the 1960s, and inherited by the BUFVC in 1974, the British Universities Newsreel Database (BUND) has been developed in its online version with funds from HEFCE and, more recently, from the AHRB (Arts and Humanities Research Board). The BUND now delivers a high-quality database of information on some 160,000 issued British cinema news stories from 1911 to 1979, plus around 80,000 items of ephemera and scripts integrated with the story descriptions. The database, which uniquely carries data drawn from most of the important British cinema newsreel companies, is now fully integrated with the new British Pathe online delivery of some 40,000 newsreel stories in encoded form for progressive download. The BUND is

currently available without charge through a simple sign-in routine at www.bufvc.ac.uk/newsreels

BUFVC/ITN Archive Scoping Study (including Reuters Television)

Arising from the BUFVC's established track record in working with British cinema newsreel companies, we are now exploring an industry-academia collaboration to open up and deliver large quantities of selected newsfilm drawn from the ITN Archive and Reuters Television. This combined newsfilm collection, which holds material dating from 1896 through to the present day, is said to be the second largest in the world. The nine-month Scoping Study, due to report in August 2003, is intended to lead to a two-year programme of intensive encoding activity. If this proceeds, the target will be to encode and launch online some 3,000 hours of selected newsfilm content. At the heart of the collaboration lies the ideal of a 'win-win' situation, where extensive academic work on the ITN/Reuters collection will reveal content which will also be of commercial value to the owners. For a full update on the study, see www.bufvc.ac.uk/itnstudy

Researcher's Guide Online

One of the BUFVC's most popular book publications is the *Researcher's Guide to British Film and Television Collections* which has appeared in six editions since 1981 and is widely regarded as the 'bible' for those starting out on the trail to obtain access to archive footage. Now the Guide is delivered in an online form which is regularly updated and offers hot links to some of the catalogues of the archives it describes. There are more than 550 sources listed, including radio and related documentation collections. The Researcher's Guide Online is accessible via www.bufvc.ac.uk/databases/rgo

Education Media Online

In 2000 the BUFVC, partnered with the Rights Department at the Open University, was given the responsibility of establishing and running a Managing Agent (MA) and an Advisory Service (AS) for moving pictures and sound online in UK higher and further education. This joint activity goes under the title of MAAS Media Online (see www.bufvc.ac.uk/maas). Following more than two years of work by MAAS, the first collections of film and video were released online on 7 January 2003 via Education Media Online (see

www.emol.ac.uk), hosted by the national data centre, EDINA, at the University of Edinburgh. The first releases are delivered for progressive download (both MediaPlayer and QuickTime variants at 768 kbps) in full-length and segmented form with accompanying descriptive metadata. The quality is such that it might be regarded as the VHS of the online world, and it stands up well to being projected onto the large screen. The film collections will also be offered later as 'streams' from another source. For the time being, progressive download is regarded as a flexible and cost-effective solution to deliver high-quality moving picture content to licensed users. It is also an attractive prospect for teachers and researchers to be able to download and to hold the material on their hard disk devices so that writing, courseware and presentations can be made around the material at home or at work.

At the time of writing, the moving images we have cleared for online delivery are available free of charge for use during a ten-year term. More films are now being released in a rolling programme via Education Media Online. From the first group, which is primarily nonfiction content, readers of *Screen* may find the ETV Films content interesting. This is a collection of archive documentary films from the former USSR, East Germany and China. There is also the long documentary made by John Lowenthal, *The Trials of Alger Hiss*, the subject of which (the guilt or innocence of Alger Hiss) is still a cause of significant controversy. Closer to home, a group of films from the Films of Scotland collection are now on offer – including the Oscar-winning documentary *Seaward the Great Ships*. There are also up-to-date films on science and medicine. To obtain access, an institution simply has to be Athens-authenticated and be signed up to a sub-licence agreement (which is currently offered without charge).

This rapidly developing form of delivery in the UK leans heavily on the investment funding of the Higher Education Funding Councils through the JISC. For the time being, the content we are arranging to deliver is available without subscription charge. However, it is clear that in the not too distant future charges will have to be made (though not at the user level). The message now is to make use of what is on offer, try it out, experiment with different forms of presentation, embed the content in your teaching and reference it in your research and writing. This would be the first move towards creating student viewing lists (as well as reading lists) in all subject disciplines taught in universities and colleges. If there is material which users would like to see added to the collections, we will respond to proposals.

The initiatives described here are just a few of the early steps towards making the access, delivery and use of moving pictures in higher and further education a little easier. The prospect of integrating high-quality dynamic audiovisual content with text in

learning, teaching and research – anytime, anyplace – is an important goal. This goal has changed little since the inception of the BUFC in 1948 – it is simply that the means to accomplish the ambition appear now to be falling into place

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The 24th International New Latin American Film Festival

Havana, Cuba, 3–13 December 2002

DOLORES TIERNEY

For the scholar of Latin/o American cinema, the annual International Film Festival in Havana is *the* place to experience the best of Cuban and Latin American film. Despite Cuba's difficult economic and political situation, the festival remains one of the main meeting points where Latin American filmmakers can present their work and exchange ideas. Yet although it is still a sparkling event with a great deal of prestige, the relevance of the festival to the launching of important films has declined over the years, to the extent that nowadays films such as *Cidade de deus/City of God* (Kátia Lund and Fernando Meirelles, Brazil, 2002) already have distribution deals before arriving at Havana, while other films that are big successes at the festival, such as *La Estrategia del caracol/The Strategy of the Snail* (Sergio Cabrera, Colombia, 1993), never get distribution in the USA or UK.

Although the festival is primarily focused on advancing the cause of frequently marginalized Latin American cinema, it also screens contemporary international cinema and pays homage to significant figures from Latin American and World cinema. This year it honoured the work of the proponent of Italian neorealism Cesar Zavattini, Argentinian actor Federico Luppi and Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha. Luppi, best known to English-language audiences for his portrayal of the kindly vampire in *Cronos* (Guillermo del Toro, 1993), was in Havana for the festival and visibly moved by his award for lifetime achievement (Premio Coral de Honor).

Retrospectives gave equal attention to the achievements of both Latin American and European cinema. A series celebrating *Cahiers du cinéma* emphasized the journal's fifty-year legacy of cinematic innovation; another, 'Nosotros, la música' ('We, the music') celebrated the Cuban musical documentary. Among the contemporary 'national' cinemas represented by special programmes were US Independent, Norwegian, Canadian, US Latino and Spanish. Forty-one fictional feature-length films (seventeen in the category of first works), thirty-one documentaries and twenty-seven animated films competed in the festival. *City Of God* won the top prize (El Gran Coral) for best fiction film; its stylistically innovative depiction of gang warfare in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* has made a huge impression world-wide. It shared the prize with the Argentinean film *Tan de repente/So Suddenly* by Diego Lerman. Coral Prize for best documentary went to *Señorita Extraviada/Missing Young Woman*, by Chicana filmmaker Lourdes Portillo. This documentary deals with the shocking case of 200 unsolved murders of women in Juárez, Mexico. Coral prize for best foreign documentary was won by Spanish filmmaker Carlos Bosch for his *Balseros*, which follows the fate of seven Cubans who take to sea in an attempt to reach the USA. Generally, Argentina and Brazil were the countries best represented in terms of prize distribution. Winning films included: *Madame Satá* (Karim Ainouz, Brazil), *Historias mínimas/Minimal Stories* (Carlos Sorín, Argentina) and *Abril despedaçado/Behind the Sun* by Walter Salles, the Brazilian director of the Oscar-nominated *Central Station*.

Since its inception, the festival has been unusual in its promotion of Latin American animation, which is considered as a separate category, with three awards for the best works. This year the first Premio Coral went to the Chilean *Como alitas de Chincol* (Vivienne Barry), a homage to the women in the poorest communities of Santiago who recorded the years of the dictatorship through their embroidery.

Among the films outside the competition but included in the festival, audience preferences included Julie Taymor's *Frida*, about the political, artistic and sexual life of the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, and Colombian director Jorge Alí Triana's *Bolívar Soy Yo/Bolívar is Me*, about a *telenovela* star who confuses his portrayal of the Colombian liberator with his real identity. Mexican Arturo Ripstein's *La virgen de la lujuria/Virgin of Lust* was less well received, with many considering it overwhelming and lengthy, and inferior to his previous successes such as the digitally-shot adaptation of Medea, *Así es la vida/Such is Life*.

An essential part of the experience of the Havana Film Festival is the Cuban audience, famous for being avid and knowledgeable filmgoers. Journalists, critics and filmmakers had to vie with the enthusiastic public for seats in Havana's twenty-three cinemas. Despite its youth – at nearly a quarter of a century old it is a

relatively young festival – screenings ran smoothly throughout the day. However, for those who do not speak Spanish, one drawback of the festival is that only the films in competition are subtitled in English.

Beyond the film screenings, seminars and mini conferences represent another important aspect of the festival. At the Critics Day, the FIPRESCI jury members offered their opinions on contemporary film criticism. The British journalist Shelia Johnston highlighted how the internet has positively impacted on film criticism, facilitating access to information about alternative cinemas. However, she also suggested that the pressures of the blockbusters' marketing machines often result in the regrettable marginalization of this cinema in terms of column inches. The intervention of Cuban journalist Joel del Río caused considerable controversy. He suggested Cuban film criticism was divided into two camps, on the one hand a kind of Parnassian criticism that delights in hermetic, elitist cinema and despairs of commercial cinema, and on the other a populist criticism that is easily swayed by non-critical criteria, such as box-office returns. Del Río's claims caused outrage in the audience, especially amongst other Cuban journalists. As one who had considerable difficulty getting permission to travel to this 'rogue nation' from the USA, I found this a valuable, but unfortunately rare, moment of political intervention.

Other events were nevertheless extremely interesting, particularly the now regular annual seminar 'Latinos in the USA'. Chaired by the legendary Alfredo Guevara – founder of Cuba's Film Institute (ICAIC) and now Festival President – Alfredo De Villa (*Washington Heights*) and other Latino filmmakers spoke about one of the most important challenges they face: how to tap into the potential audience of forty million Latinos in the USA. One director who has managed to reach the Latino audience and beyond is Robert Rodriguez, whose most recent work (*Spy Kids* and *Spy Kids II: The Island of Lost Dreams*) was offered as an example of the crossover potential of a Latino director to appeal not just to Latino but also mainstream audiences, whilst successfully bypassing Hollywood tendencies to stereotype Latino characters. Although this was an interesting event, it lacked the direction it has shown in previous years, when Guevara has invited Cuban-American and Latino scholars from the USA who can speak on the topic.

The festival as usual attracted many US filmmakers and stars. Following in the footsteps of a recent visit by Stephen Spielberg were Marisa Tomei, in Havana with two films, *In the Bedroom* and *Just a Kiss*, and Matt Dillon, with his directorial debut *City of Ghosts*. Danny Glover and Harry Belafonte were also in town, and introduced a political tone by using press conferences to voice their opposition to imminent war with Iraq.

Although it seemed a bumper year in terms of Brazilian and

Argentine cinema, there was little to be optimistic about for Cuban cinema. Since the 1959 Revolution, under the auspices of the ICAIC, Cuba has been a significant force in Latin American filmmaking, producing auteurs such as the late Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (*Memorias de subdesarrollo/Memories of Underdevelopment* [1968] and *Fresa y chocolate/Strawberry and Chocolate* [1993]). Though Cuban film production has experienced lean years, particularly during the 'Special Period' (1990–96), it has managed to maintain an almost continuous output of films through recourse to co-productions, mainly with European media conglomerates. This year, however, was the first in which Cuba had no feature films in competition. Two films tipped for inclusion in the festival – Fernando Perez's digitally-shot documentary *Suite Havana* and Enrique Colinas's feature *Entre Ciclones/Between Cyclones* – were pulled at the last minute when a broken AVID machine prevented completion of the editing process. But it was promised that five feature films were scheduled for release in 2003, including a Spanish co-production *Aunque estés lejos/Even Though You Are Far Away* by Juan Carlos Tabio, and *Perfecto Amor Equivocado* by Gerardo Chijona.

Marking the end of the festival, the gala closing ceremony was presided over by director Roman Polanski (whose *The Pianist* was screened) and Colombian Nobel Laureate, Gabriel García Márquez.

Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film*. New York, NY: Verso, 2002, 484 pp.

LAURA U. MARKS

Atlas of Emotion is a gorgeous object, a scholarly coffee-table book. It is beautifully designed, imaginatively illustrated, heavy and sumptuous; in keeping with the book's haptic (or at least non-optical) strategy, the pages are so shiny they are difficult to read. A rich object, it is also a richly interdisciplinary work, which belongs as much to architectural history, or what Stephen Greenblatt on the book-jacket terms 'mobility studies', as to cinema studies. Giuliana Bruno's argument is also intermedial, in that she brings together on these pages works in different media to create emergent understandings. Thus, for example, Rossellini's *Voyage to Italy* meets Sartre's travel memoir of Venice to evoke the nausea of self-loss that besets the traveller ('What to do? To eat? To caress? To vomit?' [Sartre, quoted on p. 394]). Or a 1615 travelling library meets Rachel Whiteread's ghostly plaster-cast library to suggest the relationships among archive, emotion and memory. Or a discussion of the images of the face of a woman giving birth in Bernini's frescos at St Peter's Cathedral is 'illustrated', in a subtle critique of the culture's fixation with female fertility, with the author's own sonogram.

Expansive outside, expansive inside: the book's central theoretical concern is to reinvent the ontology of cinema from spectacle, mastery and gaze to spatiality and motion, with its multiple connotations from travelling to emotion. Offering a pre- and parallel history of cinema as a means of private, imaginative and subjective travel, Bruno shifts the (proto)cinematic subject 'from spectator-voyeur to spectatrix-voyageuse' (p. 157). She interweaves a vast array of European cultural practices from the sixteenth to the

twentieth centuries that provide a particular genealogy of cinematic spectatorship as mobile, embodied and typically feminine. These include cartography, travel and travel writing, architecture, museums, fashion, gardens, cemeteries and many other habitable spaces, as well as contemporary visual art and cinema itself.

In this vast reinvention, Bruno revisits and revalues historical artefacts that have been critiqued by gaze theory and feminist and postcolonial scholarship. Gaze theory identified in Renaissance perspective, colonial tourism, cartography and other areas the historical origins of a will to dominate, a construction of the self at the expense of others, an association of agency with disembodiment, and an implicitly male point of view. Bruno explores these same areas to find compelling evidence of the contrary: an agency that is partial, mobile, intersubjective, embodied and implicitly female. The museums to which Bruno looks for cinematic antecedents are not the institutions for the classification and control of knowledge but the cabinets of curiosity that supported a curious, subjective engagement. In the period characterized by 'downcast eyes' or increasing distrust of visibility,¹ Bruno identifies an increasingly vigorous body. The visibility of Bruno's spectatrix—*voyageuse* is embodied, and mainly in her feet. Travel, domestic space and urban space become sites of women's agency and self-discovery, not of patriarchal control. For example, Bruno argues that protocinematic devices such as the eighteenth-century optical box were not 'peep shows', with their implications of voyeurism and control, but sites for imaginative travel. Travel and tourism, even on the waves of European colonial expansionism, were a means not (only) of patriarchal and colonial domination (as scholars such as Fatima Tobing Rony and Mary Louise Pratt have argued)² but also of self-discovery. Bruno shares her appreciation of Miss Esther Lyons, Travel Lecturer, whose 1897 photographs of her Alaskan travels are fascinatingly prefaced with a self-portrait of the lecturer not on an icy cliff but at a mirror, applying eye makeup. 'The mirror is the starting point of a spatiovisual diary, for it houses the tours and detours of identity' (p. 114). Bruno places this artefact in the context of women's travel costume, ingenious Vuitton collapsible writing desks, and women travellers, who outnumbered men at the time of the Cook tours (p. 116).

The cinema-travel link establishes a precedent for female (and implicitly all) spectatorship among the Baedeker-toting women who gained identities through actual travel or who travelled imaginatively through geography lessons and reading. Travel literature, Bruno argues, was a proto-cinema with a largely female audience. Gazing upon the panoramic wallpaper decorated with famous city views that was wildly fashionable in the late eighteenth century, proto-spectators travelled imaginatively in their homes. Women's fans painted with views offered a 'private cinema' (p. 134) in an accessory that

1 Martin Jay *Downcast Eyes* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993)

2 Fatima Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1996); Mary Louise Pratt *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992)

allowed one (as do mobile phones nowadays) to travel virtually and flirtatiously withdraw

In drawing these links, Bruno *reinvents the critical genealogy* of both cinema and its antecedents. Perhaps the most fascinating and beautifully developed of these intermedial linkages is cinema-cartography. Bruno argues that cartography is not necessarily a medium for mastering space, but that it can extend subjectivity and emotion into space. 'Looking elsewhere for the founding myth of cinema' than Plato's cave (p. 138), Bruno finds it in the *Carte du pays du tendre* of Madeleine de Scudéry. Beginning in 1653, this Parisian intellectual held weekly salons in which women collaborated on projects that created subjective, emotional contexts for the new cultural interests in spatiality – geography, cartography, gardens. The *carte du tendre* is a map of the possible courses of love, for example from the River of Inclination to the Dangerous Sea or from Negligence to the Lake of Indifference. These super-*proto-feminists'* affective maps, and others like them, offered a model of embodied response to place that remained influential well into the nineteenth century. Thereafter the *carte du tendre* became perhaps a more minor practice, but one that resurfaced in Walter Benjamin's desire to chart an emotional map, and the Situationists' psychogeographies of Paris, which subjectively draw out the city as a story. Practices of affective mapping continue in, for example, Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour*, Michelangelo Antonioni's 1960s *oeuvre* of *dérive* films, the quite literally cartographic films of Peter Greenaway, and the work of contemporary visual artists such as Rebecca Horn and Annette Messager.

Recently a doctoral student expressed to me the dismay, familiar to many of us, that cinema theory always seems to destroy the thing it loves. Bruno offers a double solution to this problem: to write *around* cinema, to give it a richly furnished locomotive (let us say) in which to travel, and to write herself, as theorist, *within* cinema. She approaches her object of study with sympathy and affection. And she offers a model of a located, subjective and emotional film theory. There is room in the *Atlas* for Bruno's personal history and for poetic sketches of film characters that taste autobiographical. 'In mapping', she writes, 'we draw (in) the past, not to conserve bygone images but to grasp their conflation with the present and assess if it is really offering something new' (p. 418). I took this to describe both the mapping of one's own life and the mapping of cultural history, by describing affective investments in space in a tender, critical and expectant way.

In short, Bruno offers both a theory of cinematic embodiment and an embodied cinema theory. Her most provocative argument is that the dominant theoretical mode, which attempts to master its object from an impersonal distance, leads to an understanding of cinema as doing the same thing. 'Can we recognize now that this disembodied

theoretical “eye” trapped the cinema in a similar specular, optical model?” (p. 411) Well, can we? Bruno’s optimism about (relatively) popular culture is a welcome antidote to the reflexive paranoia that cultural critique sometimes adopts. Her argument that theory springs from personal, emotional locations is a solid one that has been well established by feminist and minority critics. Yet I do not believe it follows that cinema never tries to distance and control the object of its perception. Some films call up an affective response, like pain or anger, which can be, and in some cases should be, oppositional. Some films are distanced and optical, and that is all right. Let the theorists come closer to the cinema, but let the cinema be what it is: controlling, yielding, propagandistic, intimate, poetic or chock-a-block with facts.

Bruno offers an original mobilization of the haptic, this term familiar to art history but newly dear to cinema studies. Psychologists define the haptic sense as a combination of kinaesthesia, touch, proprioception and internal bodily sensation. Although she mentions touch, Bruno concentrates on the first of these, suggesting that haptic cinema creates a habitable space in which one can move. ‘the haptic nature of cinema involves an architectural itinerary, related to motion and texture rather than flatness. It takes the haptic to be the measure of our tactile apprehension of space, an apprehension that is the effect of our movement in space’ (p. 250). According to this conception, a work is haptic less in the sense of its visual form – which is the way scholars such as Noel Burch, Antonia Lant³ and I have employed the term – and more in the narrative sense that invites the beholder metaphorically to move or to travel. These, in turn, give rise to subjective, emotional response, for emotion, as the reader is often reminded, shares an etymology with motion. Rejecting Gilles Deleuze’s treatment of the affection image as inadequate and over-literal, Bruno finds a more fruitful source for the haptic in Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s writing on nomad art. Yet she focuses on the fact that nomads move, rather than on the subtle argument that Deleuze and Guattari offer on the non-optical art they produce. A problem is that haptic art, by their account, is precisely that which does *not* create illusory depth; quite the opposite of the space for imaginative travel that Bruno asserts it to be.

I have mentioned that *Atlas of Emotion* contributes to discourses of embodiment in cinema that are well under way. Published in 2002, the book appears not to have been revised after Bruno finished writing it in 1998, and hence a dialogue is not enlisted with some of the newer voices. For example, Rachel O. Moore’s *Savage Theory Cinema as Modern Magic* (1999) and my own *The Skin of the Film Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (2000), trace paths markedly similar to the one Bruno takes through theories of mimesis to the tactilism of classical film theory – through Roger

3 Noel Burch, *Life to These Shadows*, trans and ed Ben Brewster (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press 1990); Antonia Lant, ‘Haptical cinema’ *October* no. 75 (Autumn 1995) pp. 45–73.

Caillois and Michael Taussig to Béla Balász and Walter Benjamin – in order to describe a mimetic, embodied relation between cinema and spectator. Those matchmakers on the editorial board of *Screen* must have invited me to review *Atlas of Emotion* because Bruno and I have both offered extensive yet quite divergent understandings of cinema as a haptic medium. While I argue that haptic visuality entails a shared embodiment and dissolution of intersubjective boundaries between cinema and its beholder, Bruno conceives of haptic cinema as instating a mutual mobility of film and beholder. While I suggest that the oscillation between haptic and optical visuality engenders a subject that merges with and emerges from the world, Bruno's haptic subject is a subject in becoming, one for whom motion is a means to emotional self-discovery.

I wished for a clearer explanation of how the haptic gives rise to emotion more than do other embodied perceptions. Certainly travel gives rise to emotional experience, but does movement itself? The most persuasive argument was through examples that implied a genealogy of motion-emotion. One is the magic lantern shows of Duchenne de Boulogne, Charcot's teacher. In Duchenne's performance of his *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine* (1862), renderings of different emotional states (elicited by the application of electrical probes to subjects' faces) dissolved into each other, so that, for example, 'desperation' becomes 'ire' which in turn becomes 'spiritual rapture' (pp. 142–3). Similarly, a brief foray reinvents psychoanalytic film theory not through Freud but through the protocinematic phenomenon of mesmerism. Bruno tells how Franz Anton Mesmer, underappreciated para-physicist and psychoanalyst, channelled subjects' 'animal magnetism' through his gaze, a tactile vision that reached into subjects' unconscious in order to heal them.

But usually the connection between perception and psychic interiority is elided in the term '*emotion*'. When Bruno refers to 'the emotion of motion' in early-cinema urban panoramas (p. 184), I am reminded of James Cameron's needlessly defensive remark to our students when he visited my university in 1998 to pick up his honorary doctorate: 'Adrenaline is not an emotion!' Where, then, does emotion arise in the course of embodied experience? It is not quite clear, except through the metaphor of travel.

Reading *Atlas of Emotion* is like sailing a big boat on a brisk day. Given the breadth of disciplines and depth of historical material, references speed by, and if one can be dextrous enough it is pleasurable to whisk along. Elsewhere Bruno's penchant for rhetoric, in sentences like 'Film, like an *emotional* map, here [in the cartographic view] becomes a geographic vessel, a receptacle of imaging that moves, a vehicle for emotions' (p. 207) or '[since houses contain narratives] there is a tactile continuum – a haptic hyphen – that links the house and the house of pictures' (p. 105) left me feeling a bit seasick. It is unfortunate that Bruno tends to embed

an argument in the coinage of terms. Terms like 'emotion', '(e)moving images' are repeated frequently, yet, as I have mentioned, such rhetorical sleight of hand prevented me from grasping exactly *how* motion leads to emotion. After some of these gusts of rhetoric I had to place the book aside to gather my own breath.

Such verbal rhetoric could easily defer to the visual 'rhetoric' of the book's fascinating and provocative images – 155 illustrations and sixteen colour plates, exquisitely placed in counterpoint to the text. *Atlas of Emotion* is in many ways a visual essay, for the images make convincing arguments in their own language. These include the 'love maps' by Scudéry and others, James Wyld's four-storey 'Great Globe' that visitors climbed inside in London, 1851–62, an astonishing architectural drawing from 1798 by Jean-Jacques Lequeu, engravings of garden plans, advertisements for Vuitton travel accessories, and beautifully chosen sequences of film stills. Contemporary visual artworks by artists such as Rachel Whiteread, Ann Hamilton, Mona Hatoum, Annette Messager, Michelangelo Pistoletto, and Guillermo Kuitca do not illustrate, but beautifully amplify Bruno's arguments in their own languages. If acquiring permissions for this wealth of images was what slowed *Atlas of Emotion's* publication process, it was worth the wait.

Is Bruno's cartographic approach to cinema as 'subjective habitation' widely applicable? Certainly it will be interesting to ask why some films, periods, genres, and so on are more spatial and habitable than others, as well as to return to highly 'optical' films in order to reconsider them as spatializations of emotion: I imagine this would be fruitful from Orson Welles to *anime*. Also, Bruno suggests that not only has cinema always been subjectively habitable, it is becoming more so. Peter Greenaway, an atypically cinematic filmmaker, gets his own chapter because she considers his work a 'barometer of historical changes that have beset spatiovisuality' (p. 286). Similarly, her references to tendencies on the edges of cinema, especially in installation art and photography, suggest a spatial or cartographic consciousness that cinema is absorbing from elsewhere. Certainly it will be interesting to take a stroll in new media using Bruno's haptic approach.

Finally, while Bruno's theory is avowedly personal, I find her mapping approach most exciting when it makes rhizomatic connections through history. The cartographic approach she offers in *Atlas of Emotions* could mobilize social and political histories, especially those that can only be approached through personal experience. Speaking of atlases, Walid Ra'ad's ongoing *Atlas Project* is an intimate, melancholic fictional archive that quite literally maps the unmappable terrain of the Lebanese civil war.⁴ *The Atlas Project* mobilizes many of Bruno's concerns to the ends not of self-discovery but of cultural healing.

4 See Sarah Rogers 'Forging history, performing memory: Walid Ra'ad's *The Atlas Project*' *Parachute* no. 108 (Autumn 2002) pp. 68–79.

Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001, 374 pp.

ALASTAIR PHILLIPS

In this textured and timely book about the global proliferation of cinemas of displacement, Hamid Naficy makes the moving observation that many films made by filmmakers living in exile contain moments in which characters 'go through suitcases while lovingly caressing, selecting, examining, and reading their contents and remembering the people and places they have left behind' (p. 266). He suggests in relation to a film like Fernando Solanas's *Tangos Exile of Gardel* (1985) that this trope becomes 'more a vehicle of connection and expansion than of separation and constriction' (p. 266). This dialectic operates as a conceptual fixture throughout the book for it serves to distinguish a number of ways in which the often artisanal nature of exilic filmmaking may be understood in terms of its textual singularities and its specific means of production, distribution, consumption and reception. The films discussed in this book all serve to underline a bold argument that a doubleness pervades the exilic experience, and in turn its modes of representation, and it is this instability between the projection of a desire for a real or imagined past home and the reverse articulation of the unsettling fact of absence that accounts for an aesthetics and politics based on the principles of ellipsis, fragmentation, self-reflexivity and a 'multiplicity of identity and multifocality' (p. 271).

In line with current trends in film scholarship which seek to unpick the fixities of stable notions of cinema and national identity, Naficy proposes that 'within every transnational culture beats the hearts of multiple displaced but situated cultures interacting with one another' (p. 6). Rather like a well-travelled suitcase brimming over with evocative artefacts of its own, the book presents close and often

revealing analyses of the work of key filmmakers such as Jonas Mekas, Chantal Akerman, Andrei Tarkovsky and Elia Suleiman. Naficy also links these individual studies with investigations of broader trends such as *beur* cinema in France, the cinema of Turkish emigres in Germany and the work of Iranian filmmakers currently operating in exile in Europe and the USA. What marks this work as a whole and why may it be termed 'accented'? By using a deliberate linguistic frame of reference, the author carefully demonstrates both the sense of a different cultural *voice* contained in a permanent dialogic relationship with the dominant host culture and a different *practice* which engages with received notions of mainstream filmmaking. Thus, if 'the dominant cinema is considered universal and without accent, the films that diasporic and exilic subjects make are accented'. [a]ccented filmmakers are not just textual structures or fictions within their films; they are also empirical subjects, situated in the interstices of cultures and film practices, who exist outside and prior to their films' (p. 4)

Although Naficy strives hard to clarify these specific histories, his work is also marked by the task of working towards a condensation or synthesis of the various tropes and principles operating in the largely minor cinemas he observes. And it is here that the broad dialectic between the marginal and the mainstream risks becoming too categorical. In part this is a question of prose style. Naficy's writing lacks a certain suppleness in places and this is carried through in his problematic aim of tabulating a definitive paradigm of the 'components of the accented style' (pp. 289–92). This paradigm encompasses such prominent textual characteristics as an emphasis on transitional spatial locations, discontinuous diegetic time and the visual and aural inscription of various means of recorded and epistolary communication. But it is also a question of an insufficient presentation of the real textual, commercial and political complexities of conventional narrative cinema. I would argue that we also need to see Hollywood and other dominant film cultures in their temporally specific and perhaps surprisingly varied transnational contexts. In so doing, we may find more meaningful ways of illuminating their own distinctive practices of production and consumption that move beyond such received notions as the 'classic realist text' – a term cited more than once in these pages.

The book really comes alive when it seeks to analyze the characteristics of the accented style through a range of metaphorical and allegorical strategies. Naficy proposes, for instance, that 'many accented films emphasize territoriality, rootedness and geography' because of the very fact that 'they are deterritorialized' (p. 5). This 'preoccupation with place is expressed', he says, 'in their open and closed space-time (chronotopical) representations' (p. 5). This move of opening up Bakhtin's spatial analysis in relation to an investigation of exilic cinema is rich indeed, for it allows the textual

discussion to align the indexicality of the material representation of past and present locations of belonging with a plausible sense of a shifting register of feeling somewhere between the promise of utopian nostalgia and the suffocation of social entrapment. These emotions and locations seem to haunt many of the narrative images that Naficy explores, and in the concluding chapters of the book they are harnessed to speak variously of the depiction of nature, home, prison, borderland and hotel in films such as Gregory Nava's *El Norte* (1983), Amos Gitai's *House* (1980), Atom Egoyan's *The Adjuster* (1991) and Yılmaz Güney's *Yol* (1982).

The experiences of journeying and letter-writing, typical of all diasporic and exilic cultures, are developed as discrete forms of meaning pertinent to the close analysis of accented cinema in two separate stimulating chapters. As Naficy argues, for example, '[exile] and epistolarity are constitutively linked because both are driven by distance, separation, absence and loss and by the desire to bridge the multiple gaps' (p. 101). Letters in accented films, in contrast to mainstream cinema, are distinguished by the fact that rather than being 'a function of plot formation and character motivation' they tend to be an 'expression of exilic displacement, split subjectivity, and multifocalism' (p. 103). If one looks at texts such as Chantal Akerman's *News From Home* (1976) and Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1988) this argument is certainly persuasive, and Naficy is especially acute in his dissection of these and other films' rhetorical uses of sound, voiceover and silence to question norms of authenticity and belonging. The motif of the journey is also used especially insightfully since it speaks so transparently of both the heart of the exilic condition and the nature of cinematic narration. Naficy is careful to construct sub-categories in his employment of the term, and he speaks movingly of such fundamental notions as 'exploration, pilgrimage, escape, emigration and return'. As he points out, none of these travels can be considered as 'simple or homogenous'. Rather they must be seen as 'composite and evolutionary' (p. 222), and it is in this spirit that he analyzes fictional and nonfictional exilic film narratives such as Fernando Solanas's *The Journey* (1992) and Amir Naderi's *The Runner* (1985), which deal with the material and affective processes of displacement.

Ultimately, as can be seen from the range of film titles already mentioned in this review, this is a highly ambitious book. It is certainly likely to remain the definitive text for some time in the growing field of the serious study of exilic cinemas. Naficy's commitment and elaborate frame of reference is evident on every page. As well as signalling discrete networks of national or ethnic affiliation, he is also careful to sustain his commentary with the inclusion of carefully modulated work on gender, class and sexuality, even if this still remains slightly unpacked in places. It is evident that this book could be a revealing tool for teaching, but it is more

likely to remain a staple for the curious researcher. There is certainly a stimulating and internationally minded programme of coursework to be uncovered here, but in my personal teaching I would also like to see this integrated with other kinds of exilic cinematic practice. Whilst the book is largely concerned with non-mainstream cinema, there are many other histories to be told which are perhaps ironically more camouflaged because of their different consolidation into the commercial arena. This fact is temporarily signalled in the exemplary and wide-ranging bibliography in which, as well as finding the likes of Vita Sackville-West sitting next to Georges Sadoul, I noticed the incongruent alignment of the radical cultural theorist Stuart Hall and the conservative Hollywood historian Leslie Halliwell.

David N. Rodowick, *Reading the Figural, or Philosophy after the New Media* (Post-Contemporary Intervention Series). Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2001, 276 pp.

C. PAUL SELLORS

For those already persuaded by poststructuralism, David N. Rodowick's most recent book, *Reading the Figural, or Philosophy after the New Media*, will provide a challenging, provocative, and more than likely convincing analysis of 'the figural'. Informed by the writings of Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, Kracauer and Deleuze, Rodowick aims to explain not only what the figural is and how it comes about but, more importantly, how the concept of the figural defines and demonstrates a semiotic regime that does not prioritize linguistic over graphical representation. Although the book's title includes the term 'new media', Rodowick does not suggest that new media motivate this shift in semiotics. Developing from Nietzsche's philosophy, figural discourse is central to many poststructural continental philosophers. Understanding figural discourse has become increasingly urgent as global capitalism proves capable of adapting to and dominating 'digital culture'. He concludes that only by understanding figural discourse genealogically will it be possible to regain some of the control and ideals that digital culture promises.

Rodowick addresses the figural on three fronts: as a semiotic theory, as a social theory of the dominance of art and social life by commodity form, and as a theory of power relations deployed by capital through new media (p. x). These concerns are discussed across seven chapters – a collection of mostly previously published essays written over a period of seventeen years. This gestation period is evident in the strong reverberations between this and his other books, the depth and scope of his analysis, and the single-mindedness connecting the chapters. The first three chapters –

'Presenting the Figural', 'Reading the Figural', and 'The Figure and the Text' – each aim to explain the figural, from its conceptualization by Lyotard, through its importance for Deleuze and Foucault, to its appearance in film theory. Chapter four, 'The End of the Aesthetic', charts capital's erosion of conventional aesthetics and the potential that a genealogical awareness of cultural experience presents for understanding new media. Chapters five and six, 'The Historical Image' and 'A Genealogy of Time', lay out lineages of the figural in twentieth-century continental thought and identify a notable shift in representation in French film after 1958. Furthermore, chapter six aims to displace Hegelian historiography with Nietzschean genealogy. I feel it is this chapter that most clearly explains the scope of, and Rodowick's motivating interest in, the figural. The last chapter, 'An Uncertain Utopia – Digital Culture', identifies the proliferation of capital through digital media and proposes that a genealogical understanding of the figural will identify and enable resistance to capital's co-optation of figural discourse.

As impressive as Rodowick's account is, he does little to persuade those sceptical of poststructuralism that it offers a viable methodology for getting at the issues incorporated in the figural. This would not be a substantial issue if it were not for the fact that he roots his views on the supposed dead-ends of Enlightenment philosophy. I am in sympathy with Rodowick's initial premiss: linguistic models have limited theories of film and media and need to be reconsidered. However, I fail to see that this justifies a wholesale abandonment of innumerable, diverse philosophies articulated over a couple of centuries. Yet this is basically what he does. 'Over the course of two centuries, philosophy has barricaded itself within a concept of *speech* as the site of discourse, communication, meaning and rational thought'. As a result, 'meaning in the "plastic" arts – architecture, painting, sculpture, and subsequently photography, cinema and video – had either to be understood as reducible to linguistic sense or valorized as exceeding "rational" thought'. Quite dismissively he concludes that modern media has 'rendered this distinction [between linguistic and plastic representation] obsolete, creating new systems of spatialization and temporality – indeed, new forms of thought – that modern philosophy is ill equipped to describe or understand' (p. 45). Such a damning pronouncement on so much philosophy surely requires explanation and examples, but they are not forthcoming.¹ He later singles out analytic philosophy for 'treating discourse as isolatable, formal unities: signs, words, statements, syllogisms' (p. 50). Rodowick does not permit Enlightenment and analytic philosophies a fair hearing. To the best of my recollection, Enlightenment philosophy is characterized through generalized accounts of Hegel and Kant, while not a single analytic philosopher is permitted a word in defence.

This raises a couple of concerns. First, it is not entirely certain

¹ To be fair, he does offer rare signposts to such debates in his endnotes.

that the distinction between linguistic and plastic representation has collapsed. I wondered what to make of the statement 'the culture of the book is being "remediated", if not replaced, by one of hypermedia or the multimedia image where the linear form of writing and the act of reading are becoming increasingly graphical, temporal, and nonlinear' (pp. 210–11) as I read this book cover to cover. Furthermore, much of his concern for digital technologies centres on digital representation being 'virtual', abandoning 'truthful representations' (p. 212). Why? Both digital and analogue photography are technologies of the index, capturing images of existing objects. Optically they are the same, it is the storage medium that differs. Manipulation is the salient issue. Even so, photographs have almost always been open to manipulation, digital technology just makes the job easier, and perhaps more difficult to detect. We need to be more attentive to the distinction between technology and its *use*. That said, I feel that Rodowick does raise a valuable concern regarding capital and media control.

Second, many analytic philosophers concern themselves with concepts and proposition, but not language. As a result, 'modern philosophy' may not be as 'ill equipped' as Rodowick proposes. With Foucault, Rodowick argues that a series of oppositions from Enlightenment philosophy remain and must be demolished: 'verbal and visual signs, saying and seeing, propositions and pictures' (p. 52). There are two separate issues here. The first deals with aesthetics and semiotic systems. He asks whether it is appropriate that speech and writing should have a privileged status over audiovisual signs. This is a sensible question that directly addresses concerns about cultural representations and power relations. However, the term 'proposition' is slippery. Understood as 'statement' in opposition to pictures, its use here is reasonable. A few pages on, though, the term 'proposition' reappears in a discussion of analytic philosophy. Understanding 'proposition' as 'statement' is not entirely accurate in this context. There is an important distinction in logic between a proposition and a statement. 'A proposition is thought of as identical with the meaning or sense of a sentence rather than with the actual sentence itself.'² Two distinct sentences having the same sense express the same proposition. Furthermore, propositions are not necessarily bound to language. Anything that expresses meaning expresses a proposition. If an image has sense, then it expresses a proposition, and it need not be reducible to linguistic terms. Philosophers use language and logical notation to communicate their views, but this does not imply a necessary prioritization of language. Those prioritizing language do so in virtue of their philosophical persuasions, not in virtue of the discipline. If we recall Rodowick's assertion that '*énoncés* are not identical to sentences' (p. 58), then it appears that the conceptual gap between *énoncés* and propositions may not be the gulf that Rodowick proposes. To suggest that all

2 Paul Thomassi, *Logic* (London: Routledge 1999) p. 15

3 Richard Allen and Murray Smith
articulate many philosophical
difficulties endemic to
poststructural continental
philosophy in the introduction to
their *Film Theory and Philosophy*
(Oxford: Clarendon Press 1997)
pp 1–35

philosophies except poststructuralism are incapable of illuminating modern media seems either naive or misguided.

I find this book also lacks a substantial justification of its own philosophical views. With significant challenges to psychoanalysis circulating in film theory, especially from within the cognitive strain, and the problems of relativism and of thinking across epistemes in Foucault's work, the question remains as to why a reader should accept poststructural continental philosophy as a method for understanding the issues of figural discourse.³ Clearly it is utilitarian, Rodowick's arguments follow interestingly and insightfully from it. Nevertheless, a theory's usefulness does not necessarily endorse its validity. In light of such challenges to continental thought, and Rodowick's rejection of Enlightenment philosophies, it seems reasonable to want from Rodowick either an explanation of how arguments against poststructuralism can be overcome, or a demonstration that these criticisms identify no problems at all.

If I have spent a fair bit of effort questioning Rodowick's philosophical leanings, it is because I feel that the issues he raises in this book are worthy of serious debate, and I want to know why this sceptic should be persuaded to his way of tackling the problems Rodowick opens his book with a quotation from Lyotard's *Discours, figure*. 'A good book would be one where linguistic time would itself be deconstructed that the reader could start wherever s/he wishes and in whatever order, a book for grazing'. I would like to propose an alternative notion a good book, regardless of one's agreement or disagreement with its content, is one that promotes engagement and discussion through rigorous, well-developed and intelligently conceived arguments. Regardless of whether Rodowick offers the former, he does deliver the latter. The issues Rodowick encases within the concept of the figural provocatively engage the role media plays in our early twenty-first-century lives. *Reading the Figural, or Philosophy after the New Media* is a book worth debating.

Andrew Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama since 1980*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, 282 pp.

BELÉN VIDAL

This volume should come as excellent news for those interested in the under-researched field of contemporary costume drama and its relation to national cinemas, and for those who, like myself, have been tracing Andrew Higson's branding work on heritage cinema. In this respect, although *English Heritage, English Cinema* draws extensively on the author's groundwork in the field that he himself defined ten years ago,¹ this is in fact an entirely new study, perceptibly more slanted towards discourses of reception.

The notion of heritage cinema was taken up by Higson in 1993 in order to connect the recent and successful cycle of quality costume dramas to the broader cultural context of the heritage industries – most notably Goldcrest ventures such as *Chariots of Fire* (Hugh Hudson, 1981) and *Gandhi* (Richard Attenborough, 1982), and the Merchant–Ivory adaptations of E.M. Forster's novels such as *A Room with a View* (James Ivory, 1986). The 'quality' label, however, started to connote middlebrow, conservative and pseudo-literary culture, as heritage films became synonymous with stock images of upper-class Englishness trading on nostalgia for the imperial past in the reactionary political climate of the Thatcher years.

By the mid 1990s the Thatchente connection had long passed its sell-by date, but the heritage label had taken root in British film studies to the extent of being adopted as a reference point even by its critics;² it was also imported, somewhat arbitrarily, for retrospective assessments of quality period drama in other national cinemas.³ Higson's new contribution to the heritage debate carries out a forceful recontextualization of the term, mapping out the costume film's move into the global circuits of production and

1 See especially 'Re-presenting the national Past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film', in Lester Friedman (ed.), *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (London: UCL Press, 1993), pp. 109–29; 'Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain' (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 'The heritage film and British cinema', in Andrew Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 232–48.

2 Hence the term *post-heritage*, which started circulating in the mid 1990s: see Claire Monk, 'Sexuality and the heritage', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 5, no. 10 (1995), pp. 32–4.

3 See for instance Richard Dyer, 'Heritage cinema in Europe', in Ginette Vincendeau (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of European Cinema* (London: British Film Institute and Cassell, 1995), pp. 204–5; Guy Austin, 'The heritage film', in *Contemporary French Cinema: an Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 142–70.

consumption in the 1990s. Thus the book records the progressive internationalization of the heritage cycle, and of the term itself as a generic label. However, the focus on the transnational economic alliances that guarantee its continuing presence in the international marketplace immediately pushes one crucial question to the fore: whose heritage – and whose cinema – are we talking about?

This is the question that the book sets out to explore. Divided into six chapters, chapters one, two, five and six expand the already established foundations of Higson's work on heritage. Thus chapter one pulls together into an orderly and manageable corpus the large number of British period dramas produced over the last two decades, in terms of different cycles (literary adaptations, historical drama, biopics), production trends, and generic characteristics, while chapter two moves on to the critical discourses mobilized by these films. The emphasis on the national past and modes of representation effectively highlights the continuities between the iconography of the costume drama dealing with images of England and the heritage industry in the fabrication of an upper-class, pastoral and nostalgic sense of 'Englishness', in demand at the international image markets.⁴

Higson tempers the dismissive undertones of this critique with the alternative voices – mostly feminist – that uphold the pleasures of masquerade and pastiche afforded by period drama, which suggest fluid sexual identities and the empowerment of viewpoints marginalized from history. However, this acknowledgement of the resistance generated by the heritage label seems more a perfunctory need to formulate a methodology of study that takes on board the contradictory discourses surrounding the films, than a genuine attempt to produce a new interpretation of the films in question. Indeed, the book repeatedly undermines all sense of finality in its assessment, asserting the need to keep open the 'textual ambivalence' of the cycle on the grounds that almost any given film can be (and has been) read both ways: as a conservative text that visually exploits the display of heritage property and the links with middlebrow culture, and as a past(iche) that makes room for progressive narratives and popular memory. This approach is not without value, but there is something frustrating in Higson's tendency towards simplification and openness, as opposed to addressing the complexities of a body of films much more varied than this study would let us believe.

This is not to say that the book does not take into account the specific changes undergone by period drama over the last twenty years – it does so mostly by inserting what it clearly conceives as a genre into the wider economic picture. It is not by accident that the central chapters constitute the true core of the matter. They present what is actually new about Higson's refining of the heritage notion: the introduction of the 'crossover' film, a relatively new category that was instrumental throughout the 1990s in relocating national

4 Mike Wayne. The re-invention of tradition: British cinema and international image markets. *EnterText* 2/1 (2001/2). URL: http://www.brunel.ac.uk/faculty/arts/EnterText/issue_2_1.htm

cinemas in the global, Hollywood-dominated market. Thus the crossover film has evolved from the occasional independently produced, art house-distributed hit that makes it into the multiplexes – the prototype in the 1990s being *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1992) – into a product designed and/or supported by Hollywood studios to cater for the more specialized tastes of crucial niche markets. The crossover film provides the perfect economic framework to analyze the increasing visibility of the English-speaking heritage product.

Thus films carefully produced and packaged for both the multiplex and more ‘upmarket’ audiences – such as *Sense and Sensibility* (Ang Lee, 1995) – have reaped the benefits of wide exposure in the USA

The book builds on its economic argument with considerable flair, but by the time we get to the case studies on *Howards End* (James Ivory, 1992) and *Elizabeth* (Shekhar Kapur, 1998), these reiterate, somewhat tautologously, what has already been said, rather than using the accrued evidence as a springboard for new and more nuanced (textual) insight. The level of detail in the analysis of the popular discourses generated by both films is impressive, but Higson does little more than tiresomely insist on the same polarized debates. The scarce instances of actual textual analysis (fifteen pages overall) tend to stick to the tracks left by Jameson’s theory of the depthlessness of the postmodern text.⁵ While allegedly ‘revising’ the tenets of his leftist critique, Higson stops short of developing the perceived elements of art-house modernism and clings instead to some of his favourite stock phrases (‘display of heritage properties’ crops up four times in only two paragraphs of the short section devoted to ‘the text itself’ in the *Howards End* chapter, pp. 172–3).

Higson’s project is compromised by its unremitting focus on a particularly restrictive version of the national (*English* heritage), pitted against the economic structures of the global image market, where such films inevitably play as ‘British’, while looking more and more like stylized Hollywood by-products. His revision of heritage minimizes the impact of other modes of production as well as other identities. The book leaves out representations of Scottishness, Welshness or Irishness, but considers it ‘important to find a place for such films like *Rob Roy* and *Braveheart* . . . and of course *Chariots of Fire* deals nearly as much with Scottishness as it does with Englishness’ (p. 4). Thus the hegemonic connotations of the term ‘heritage’ are reinforced, albeit in a different way: the ‘heritage’ given preference is that which shapes popular taste as filtered through Hollywood, and severed from its links with other national cinemas – popular or highbrow, within or without the nation

The book leaves one with the suspicion that these films are not, as heritage critics would have us believe, a compendium of flat, easily digested images of the past so much as the ‘flattened’ outcome of the narrow concerns of their critics. It is quite revealing that the book closes with a quick reference to *Gosford Park* (Robert Altman,

5 Fredric Jameson *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham NC Duke University Press, 1991)

2001) as yet another instance of a display of English heritage iconography banking on both sides of the Atlantic. 'Narratively, England is in flux. Visually, though, it looks splendid, even if the country house is only ever seen in bad weather' (p. 257). It seems as if the ruthless dissection of the national character (the secret lurking behind the frivolous murder mystery game is the sexual exploitation of working-class women) casts scarcely a shadow on the fetishism of tasteful authenticity. However, Higson's remark sounds a little too oblivious of the ironic power of a film that mocks its politically aware upmarket audiences with its 'authenticity'. At my local art-house cinema, when the aristocratic Kristin Scott Thomas ostentatiously yet nonchalantly pulls on furs made of a whole fox-skin, the audience gasped at the sight.

In tone, scope and ambition, the book's genuine vocation is to become the leading contribution to the field, and an obligatory reference in undergraduate courses on the subject. However, in order to fulfil this didactic, canon-making impulse, films that elude the success of the crossover formula never take centre-stage. In my view it is equally important to take into account art-cinema aesthetics and authorship, and search for those less visible films, box-office failures that nevertheless expand the possibilities of the cycle: take the *succès d'estime* that was *The House of Mirth* (Terence Davies, 2000), or *Onegin* (Martha Fiennes, 1998) – not once mentioned in the book in spite of its British connections – a film where 'Englishness' becomes a subtext that pervades the displacement of the cycle conventions to foreign cultural landscapes. Above all, in order to make this a productive field of study it is crucial to reframe contemporary costume drama as a positively heterogeneous and promising confluence of genres and styles, in this case by shifting the focus to films that would enrich the map of Englishness – and its discontents. The fact that a spoof of a Merchant-Ivory has been made tells us a lot about the currency of the genre in the popular imagination.⁶ Although perhaps the only thing that remains truly 'English' about English heritage films (since their audiences are not, and their makers less so) – is their critics.

6 *Stuff Upper Lips* (Gary Sinyor 1997)